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CAN McCAIN WIN NASTY?
JONATHAN CHAIT

WILL OBAMA LOSE NICE?
THE EDITORS

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THE ROSENBERG BOMBSHELL
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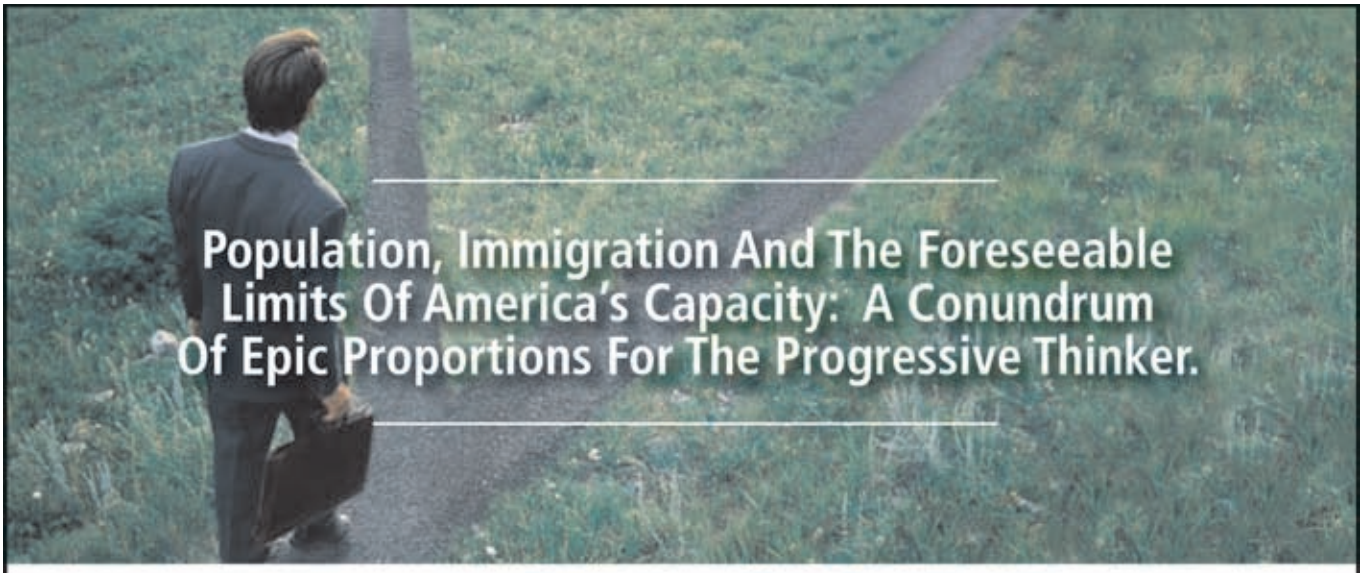

Population, Immigration And The Foreseeable Limits Of America's Capacity: A Conundrum Of Epic Proportions For The Progressive Thinker.

As America's population races from the current 300 million to a projected 400 million in the next 30 years*, progressive thinkers are confronted with a debate among themselves – and others – as to our nation's capacity to absorb natural population growth and growth due almost entirely to immigration. What price will we pay in terms of the environment? What will be the impact on resources from water to energy? What additional challenges will be created by this growth? What is our responsibility to future generations?

The Dots That Nobody Really Wants To Connect

People of virtually all major political persuasions agree that America has problems—huge problems. Air quality in many regions is a threat to health. Water is compromised and becoming scarce. Traffic in a number of metropolitan areas has arrived at a point that makes it unfixable. Infrastructure is a disaster waiting to happen. Who can argue with those observations? The disagreement arises when anyone makes the point that all of these problems are caused by a large and fast growing population, most of it unanticipated. The more people there are, the more challenging the problems become. These problems are acute with our population at the current level of 300 million. What happens at 400 million? Or 600 million?

The Misconception Of Inevitability

One prevailing thought for those who are willing to connect the dots is that meteoric population growth is inevitable. The pyramid is being built and there is nothing we can do about it. Population growth is destined to be exponential. But the reality is that Americans are having fewer children. The other reality is that America's future population growth will be driven by immigration. While immigration at some level will surely continue, there is a case to be made for taking another look at the numbers in order to maintain some order and common sense in the growth of our population.

At Some Point, You May Have To Make A Choice

We want it all. We want a clean environment, adequate natural resources, good housing, plenty of food, first-rate healthcare and so on. We also feel a need to welcome the world to our front door, or in millions of cases, our back door. But America is rapidly approaching the point of no return. Either we opt for preserving the quality of life that has attracted so many millions in the past by turning away some in the future. Or we continue to accept millions, knowing that our children and grandchildren will continue to pay a huge price.

Nobody wants to close the doors. Nobody wants to totally abandon our heritage of immigration and rich tapestry it has woven. But with more sensible numbers we could actually restore it. More and more progressive thinkers are saying it is time to connect the dots. To think about the future. To solve the conundrum that is placing so many like-minded thinkers in conflict.

America's Leadership Team for Long Range Population-Immigration-Resource Planning

300 million people today, 400 million in just 30 years. Think about it.

American Immigration Control Foundation	Californians for Population Stabilization	Federation for American Immigration Reform	NumbersUSA	Social Contract Press
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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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Fighting Chance

DAYS AFTER storied financial institutions collapsed this week, John McCain cut an ad in which he vowed to "reform Wall Street and fix Washington." It distilled the way he hopes to frame the campaign: as a referendum on who is best positioned to reform government. And it is no great mystery why he wants to do this.

McCain is a Republican. But it's the Republicans who, over the last eight years, have presided over an economy that's stripped away financial security for the middle class while bestowing the rich with even more riches. And it's the Republicans who let lobbyists write the regulations governing their clients. If voters thought McCain was just another Republican, they would run away screaming. That is why McCain is desperate to shed the label—and Barack Obama is desperate to make it stick.

KEVIN SULLIVAN/NEWSCOM

Except, um, that's not what Obama is doing. On the day before McCain released his ad, Obama gave a major speech on economics. It was a hard-hitting address, in which Obama proclaimed, "It's time to put an end to a broken system in Washington that is breaking the American economy." But the word "Republican" never came up. The next day, Obama released a somber ad in which he addressed the camera for two minutes. It included plenty of smart ideas (something he has never lacked, notwithstanding the bogus charge that he's "all talk"). But its message was all about Obama the non-ideological reformer—that is, the guy positioned to clean up Washington. "Partisan fights and outworn ideas of the left and right won't solve the problems we face today," he said. Republicans? They didn't make cameos here, either. Neither did Bush.

These omissions cannot be coincidental. Somebody in the Obama brain trust has decided that Obama will do better among swing voters if he doesn't draw attention to the fact that McCain is a Republican while he is, gasp, a Democrat. Most likely, these strategists believe that voters disdain partisanship—or, at the very least, disdain the idea of partisanship. Plus they probably think Democrats can't win presidential elections without disowning the tired ideas of the Democratic Party. Since the 1970s, the only Dems to win the White House have been those who ran as non-ideological reformers (Carter) or co-opted parts of the Republican message (Clinton).

But maybe times are changing. Once upon a time, Republicans mocked regulation and government spending—and the voters laughed along. But who's chuckling now? The collapse of investment banks, like the collapse in the mortgage securities market, was a by-product of insufficient regulation. Meanwhile, it's "old-fashioned" Democratic ideas like Social Security—a program Republicans have campaigned to privatize—that insulate senior citizens from drastic declines in the market. And government spending doesn't sound so awful if it means universal health insurance, which can reduce the threat of financial calamity for working families. Democrats have tried to shift the tax burden upward, so that the wealthy pay more of their growing largesse. After eight years of Bush tax cuts reversing that progress—and middle-class incomes stagnating—the case for making the tax code more progressive again is ironclad.

McCain's own record on these issues is no better than his party's. He has no meaningful history of standing up for stronger regulation of the financial industry. "Excessive regulation" has been a standard bogeyman in his speeches. And, for many years, McCain referred to former senator Phil Gramm as his economic mentor. That would be the same Phil Gramm who (with an assist from Clinton advisers) led the charge to repeal the financial regulations that might have helped avert the current meltdown. McCain's support for Social Security privatization is a matter of public record, as is his opposition to universal health insurance. His record on the environment is a bit better, but it must be weighed against his proposals to expand the Bush tax cuts, tilting the tax code even farther toward the wealthy.

Particularly in recent weeks, Obama has—to his credit—drawn attention to these policies. But the overarching theme of his campaign remains what it was—a nonpartisan, non-ideological message of "change." And that may be giving McCain a chance where he might otherwise not have one. The fact that, for a brief period several years ago, McCain really did buck his party and the K Street establishment gives him at least some standing to claim the reform mantle—more, certainly, than he has for presenting himself as a champion of economic security. In an argument over who will stand up to Washington special interests, McCain has, however unfairly, a fighting chance.

None of this means Obama must overhaul his message. With Obama edging ahead in the polls, at least as of this writing, there's no need for panic. But it also seems possible that Obama's earlier success bred overconfidence—and that, because of it, Obama will miss an opportunity both to put this election away and build a mandate for change. ◆

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Contents

October 8, 2008

The Editors	1	**FIGHTING CHANCE** *It's simple, Barack: He's a Republican, and you're a Democrat.*
		TRB
Jonathan Chait	5	**SARAH QUAYLIN** *Actually, Dan Quayle is looking pretty good right now.*
		THE MALL
Eve Fairbanks	7	*Is the First Dude the new Hillary?*
Jason Zengerle	10	*The truth about John McCain and those DHL workers.*
Jennifer Bradley and Bruce Katz	12	*Enough with small-town triumphalism.*
Martin Peretz	14	*The Rosenberg bombshell.*
Nate Silver	17	*How Ohio will be won.*
		FEATURES
Jonathan Chait	18	**LIAR'S POKER** *Why McCain just can't tell the truth.*
Irwin Stelzer	20	**VISIBLE HANDS** *The surrender of free-market capitalism.*
Christopher Hayes	24	**FREE TRAITORS** *Mainstream economists reconsider globalization.*
Joshua Kurlantzick	27	**MONSTERS' BALL** *Global authoritarianism on the march.*
		BOOKS AND THE ARTS
Stanley Kauffmann	33	**FILMS MATTERS OF BELIEF** *Romantic fabrications in Barcelona; postwar intrigues in Paris.*
Ruth Franklin	34	**BOOKS GOD IS IN THE HOUSE** ***Home*** *by Marilynne Robinson*
Alexander Pushkin	38	**POEM ON THE HILLS OF GEORGIA**, *translated by Peter Viereck*
Sherwin B. Nuland	39	**BOOKS SKIN DEEP** ***Making the Cut: How Cosmetic Surgery Is Transforming Our Lives*** *by Anthony Elliott*
Christopher Benfey	41	**BOOKS SING FOR ME, MUSE, THE MANIA** ***Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*** *edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton*
Alan Wolfe	46	**BOOKS GONZO SOCIOLOGY** ***The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*** *edited by John Summers*
Francesca Mari	52	**BOOKS LOVE TOMORROW** ***Love Today*** *by Maxim Biller, translated by Anthea Bell*
Alicia Ostriker	54	**POEM KOL NIDRE**
		WASHINGTON DIARIST
Leon Wieseltier	56	**THERE WILL BE BLOOD**

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Sarah Quaylin

Actually, Dan Quayle is looking pretty good right now.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Ever since John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate, I've gotten confused about all the reasons I'm supposed to dislike Barack Obama. The previous reasons, in rough chronological order, were his lack of experience, his empty rhetoric, his flip-flopping, and his "celebrity." But Palin has made each one of those critiques moot. The "celebrity" attack on Obama has a particularly Dada quality right now as starstruck Republicans bask in the charisma of their adorable veep. (Coldest state, hottest governor, read signs at her rallies.) With her hunky husband, touching family life and plucky personal story, she is the candidate of the People. And by People, I mean *People* magazine.

The flip side for Republicans of losing most of their attack lines was supposed to be a series of virtues Palin would bring to the ticket: She's a reformer, a steadfast opponent of earmarks, a proponent of transparency and clean government. Subsequent reporting has revealed that Palin embodies the precise opposite of every one of these virtues. She appointed unqualified cronies, abused her power to punish personal enemies, and has displayed a Cheney-esque passion for government secrecy. Her boast of having put the state airplane on eBay was undermined by subsequent revelations that she failed to actually sell it on eBay.

The swift disintegration of Palin's anti-pork credentials has been especially amusing. After initially casting Palin as a dedicated foe of earmarks, and then having it revealed that she asked for and received enormous sums of earmarked projects, the McCain campaign has fallen back to the defense that she requested fewer earmarks than other Alaska pols. This is true: Even though Palin took ten times the national per capita average in earmarked spending, in this regard she still rates somewhat below average by the standards of the petro-kleptocracy of the state from which she hails. Yet this defense raises the question of why Ted Kennedy never thought to run for president on the slogan "He Never Took a Drink In His Life" and then, when challenged, point out that other members of his family are less sober than he.

The main complaint against Palin has been her lack of experience. That's fortunate for her, since "experience"—especially measured in a linear way—fails to capture exactly what Palin lacks. Yes, two years as governor is less than you'd like, as is four years as senator. The real problem, though, is that Palin has no record of thinking about national or international policy. Bobby Jindal, another Republican veep contender, has barely more experience than Palin, but he is a respected policy intellectual. Pat Buchanan ran for president without ever having served in elective office, but he had engaged more deeply than most presidential candidates in policy questions.

Engagement, not experience, is the difference between Palin's qualifications and Obama's. Obama has a long-standing interest in national and (to a lesser extent) international issues and has answered questions on all those issues in extensive detail. Palin has dealt almost exclusively with parochial issues in a wildly atypical state. (Her fiscal experience, which consists of divvying up oil lucre, offers better preparation to serve as president of Saudi Arabia than the United States.) It's possible Palin has harbored a long-standing, secret passion for policy wonkery, but the few signs available thus far—her convention speech that spelled out "new-clear weapons," her evident lack of familiarity with the term "Bush Doctrine"—suggest otherwise. The Republican intelligentsia is frantically tutoring her while they run out the clock until November 4.

In lieu of opening Palin to regular questioning from the press corps, of the sort the other three candidates have all undergone many times before, the McCain campaign is helpfully leaking positive appraisals of her studiousness. "Despite the worries, [Palin] struck many campaign officials as more calm and cerebral than expected," reported *Newsweek*. "She was quick to ask questions, and to 'engage in a back and forth' with briefers." See, the McCain campaign says she's on the ball. That settles it, right?

But, somewhere in the recesses of my mind, this admiring appraisal of the prospective veep's intellect struck a familiar chord. With a quick search, I discovered that, indeed, the same was said of Dan Quayle in 1988. Twenty years ago, *The Washington Post* reported, "Bush aides, who were getting their first in-depth exposure to Quayle, were impressed by his attention span, the quality of his questions and the facility with which he moved through the agenda."

Other parallels stood out as well. Conservatives received Quayle's selection rapturously. L. Brent Bozell pronounced himself "ecstatic," and Jerry Falwell called the surprise pick "a stroke of genius." After a media frenzy, Quayle's speech was well-received. The convention hall burst into cheers of "We want Dan!" NBC anchor Tom Brokaw said that Quayle executed "flawlessly," and CBS's Bruce Morton called it "a good speech."

Questions about Quayle's readiness remained, but he did his best to turn them into elite condescension toward small-town America. Quayle, in his acceptance speech, spoke movingly about the small towns in Indiana where he had grown up, and he later disparaged Dukakis for "sneer[ing] at common sense advice, Midwestern advice."

Today, Quayle is remembered as a disaster. But, during the campaign, his supporters believed that media skepticism of Quayle had rallied ordinary Americans to his side. Dukakis "looks down on his fellow Americans. He looks down on Bush and Dan Quayle as—in his word—'pathetic,'" wrote right-wing columnist Michael Novak. "Thus, the 'feeding frenzy' of the press in New Orleans stirred a national backlash. It united all the scorned of America as one."

Conservatives are saying the same things about Palin. "Elite opinion," insisted McCain strategist Steve Schmidt, "looks down with contempt at people who are not part of their world." As Palin herself said, "If you're not a member in good standing of the Washington elite, then some in the media consider a candidate unqualified for that reason alone." To the right, the mere fact that the press questions her fitness proves that she is one of them.

As the original rationales for Palin melt away, this bond has become unshakable. Her lack of qualifications turns out to be her greatest qualification. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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Are Democrats Less Patriotic Than Republicans?

OVER THE COURSE of a generation, the far right in America has peddled a story that says liberals and Democrats aren't patriots. That's patently false, but what is true is that liberals and Democrats have let them do it. Too many liberals have an allergic reaction to patriotism. Too many liberals are more comfortable criticizing America's flaws than celebrating its promise. And too many liberals think that criticism and dissent alone are the full measure of their patriotic duty. We think it's time for progressives and true patriots to reclaim patriotism, and we've written a little book that explains how. Read *The True Patriot*. Join the conversation at truepat.org.

"The True Patriot *is an eloquent statement of the ideals on which our democracy was founded and which need to be revived by modern day patriots. Nick Hanauer and Eric Liu remind us that patriotism is not so much about waving a flag as it is about living those ideals."*

GEORGE LAKOFF, *author of* Don't Think of an Elephant

"Every once in a while a book comes along that meets its moment. The True Patriot *is just such a work. Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer's eloquent, inspirational pamphlet reminds us of the revolutionary vision of the original pamphleteers and calls us to rededicate ourselves to advancing that revolution today. Their "true patriotism" is a patriotism not of thumping our chest, but of getting to work; a patriotism not just of a Fourth of July parade, but of the inherently progressive ideals we venerate when we put our hands to our heart as the parade marches by."*

ANDREI CHERNY, *Editor of* Democracy: A Journal of Ideas, *author of* The Next Deal *and* The Candy Bombers

"The True Patriot *makes a powerful argument that our heritage as a great nation is a progressive heritage, and it shows what each one of us can do to heal America and regain our position of moral leadership at home and abroad."*

GOVERNOR HOWARD DEAN

"A must read for progressives and conservatives alike. Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer return the definition of patriotism to the founders' ideal and challenge all of us to put aside meaningless partisanship and rise up through sacrifice and innovation to face the practical realities of the 21st century."

ANDY STERN, *President, Service Employees International Union and author of* A Country That Works

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The Mall

Palin Comparison

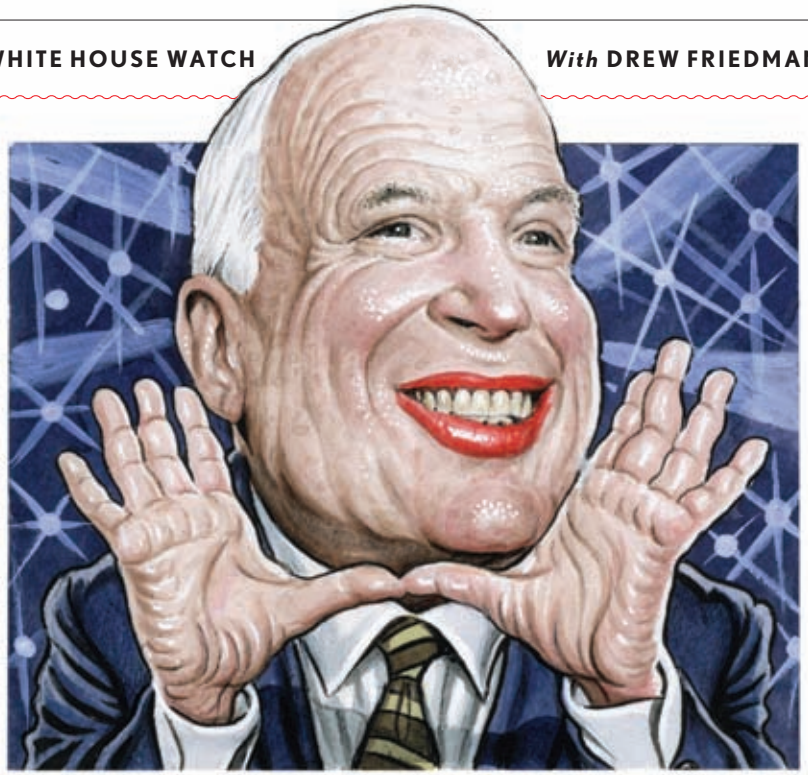
Is the First Dude the new Hillary?

To try and place the amazing Sarah Palin phenomenon, gurus have been reaching for historical analogues: she "embodies the most basic American myth—Jefferson's yeoman farmer" (Joe Klein); no, she's "the next Ronald Reagan" (Richard Viguerie); no, "she's our Obama" (Jay Nordlinger). But what about Bill Clinton?

The fitness-obsessed, policy-lite, skirt-wearing conservative from Alaska would not, on the face of it, seem to have much in common with the Big Mac–scarfing, policy-relishing, skirt-chasing Democrat from Arkansas. And yet, before Palin, what other youthful and relatively inexperienced governor from a backwater state burst onto the Washington scene, chased by an eye-popping train of hometown enemies? What other charismatic politician became a culture-war lightning rod? Who else drove his critics to such depths of rage and despair that they reached for wild conspiracy theories (a few of them actually true)?

As anyone who watched last week's "Saturday Night Live" knows, Palin is no Hillary Clinton, and she's certainly no Bill, either. If she makes it into office, she's more likely to build a bridge to nowhere than to the next century. But the more one burrows (an activity that both Clinton and Palin seem to provoke), the more weird parallels between the two emerge (could Todd Palin be Hillary with a goatee?)—and the more liberals might want to look to the Clinton years for direction on how—and how not—to hit back.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



Does this color lipstick make me look like a liar?

They were particularly attracted to those who were slavish, unobtrusive, and loyal; forceful personalities were not courted, Washington dinner party regulars were shunned—anyone who might be less than worshipful was considered suspect, a probable source of news leaks, a potential enemy." This is how Joe Klein described the Clintons in his book *The Natural*, but it describes Sarah Palin's political instincts eerily well, too. Attracted to those who were slavish? Check: As mayor of Wasilla, she tried to fire the town's librarian for having the wrong attitude, and she succeeded in firing the police chief in part because she heard he'd been "acting sad and unhappy" about her win at a Chamber of Commerce meeting. Forceful personalities were not courted and dinner-party regulars were shunned? Check: In Juneau, Palin neglected to advise powerful Republican legislators on budget negotiations because, explains Larry Persily, a longtime state employee who used to work for her, "she thinks of it as backroom deals, good-ol'-boys network, horse-trading, arm-twisting, politics as usual, the cliché." ("She doesn't do well with dissent," sniffs one GOP state legislator.)

As for turning neighbors and friends into enemies, Palin is as talented in this reverse alchemy as Clinton. In fact, their roster of foes includes the same disgruntled archetypes: the hometown exposeur (Clinton's was Larry Nichols, the Little Rock nemesis who pushed the Gennifer Flowers tale; Palin's is Anne Kilkenny, the Alaska housewife who helped get the saga of Sarah's Wasilla tyrannies into *The New York Times*); the former supporter turned critic (Clinton's include adviser Dick Morris; Palin's include Lyda Green, the Republican president of the Alaska Senate); the culture warriors (Clinton's were religious right stalwarts like Jerry Falwell; Palin's are horrified feminists like Gloria Steinem); the spouse-hunting prosecutor (Clinton's was Whitewater inquisitor Ken Starr; Palin's is Steve Branchflower, who just subpoenaed husband Todd). They

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even have matching Troopergates!

It's not too surprising that Clinton and Palin have similar political styles. They were both forged in the cramped and corrupt crucibles of small-state politics, where the political is personal and the rise of one faction often comes at the expense of another. In this environment, an us-versus-them mentality thrives, one that has led both the Clintons and Palin to lash out at their critics as a bloc—the Clintons wailed about the vast right-wing conspiracy and the snooty elites who, Hillary huffed, "wouldn't be doing this if we were from some other state"; Palin complains about the elitist left-wing media and other "opponents" who "seem to look down on" her Alaska background. It has tempted them to put under-qualified former schoolmates in high places, such as Clinton's kindergarten playmate turned chief of staff Mack McLarty and Palin's cow-loving high school classmate turned state agriculture official Franci Havemeister. And it's fed the urge to consolidate the spouse onto the political team.

Todd Palin the caregiver dad and snowmobiling—er, snowmachining—champ gives off pretty much the opposite of Hillary Clinton's famed Lady Macbeth vibe. But call around to Juneau legislators and Anchorage political observers and you'll hear grumblings about his shadowy influence, how he was cc'd on official communiqués and sometimes attended cabinet meetings. "I don't mean to compare Todd to Hillary, but it's a similar thing," remembers John Bitney, Palin's former legislative director, who, though he still praises the Palins, was fired with an assist from Todd. "He had a network of friends in the bush. [They] would call and say, 'The river's washing away the bank,' and he would pass it on up." Some insiders gossip about how Todd would sidle around the legislators' corridor in the statehouse to lobby lawmakers during gas line negotiations. "I have heard he works the second floor," whispers one statehouse observer. The subpoena an independent prosecutor served Todd last week regarding his role in pressuring the public safety commissioner to sack a state trooper once married to Palin's sister doesn't do much to dispel the odor of Whitewater that clings to Alaska's First Dude.

But what unites Clinton and Palin the most is the unique level of total, complete hysteria they provoke in their critics. Remember Representative Dan Burton, who became so obsessed with proving that Vince Foster was murdered that he recreated the death scene in his backyard, shooting at a melon standing in for Foster's head? These days, conspiracy theorists are back and having more fun than when they imagined that Web Hubbell fathered Chelsea Clinton. (Who do the chat rooms say gave birth to baby Trig today?)

Even more measured partisans can't help being swept up in an emotional tide. Take *Salon.com* essayist Rebecca Traister's recent Palin-inspired nightmares: "[S]he kidnaps my cats. . . . There's also a chilling one, in which a scary witch stands on a wind-swept hill and leers at me." Alaska House Republican Jay Ramras called Palin a McCarthyite. And, in the middle of a phone conversation I had with John Cooper, the museum director Palin fired in her first year as mayor of Wasilla, the line suddenly went silent. I assumed I had just lost the connection, but then I realized Cooper had begun to cry. "You're not supposed to get emotional, but I do," he said, after a pause. He added, "My dad went ashore at Normandy beach. This is not the kind of country he and those guys were hoping to save."

ANTHONY RUSSO; AP PHOTOS: DOUG MILLS; JEFF ROBERSON

Like Clinton, Palin infuriates precisely because she so fully embodies one side of the culture war. It's just that, instead of symbolizing dissipated baby-boomer elites, as Clinton did, Palin represents anti-intellectual evangelical reactionaries. Now, it's the Democrats who are horrified at Palin's values—injecting religion into public life, abstinence-only sex ed, antipathy toward global warming, gays, evolution—and afraid of what it would mean if, just as the country blithely accepted Clinton, America turned out to actually *like* Palin.

But, before liberals go the same extremes that conservatives went to in attacking Clinton, they should remember that Slick Willie had the last laugh. That's why the parallel between Bill Clinton and Sarah Palin could, for Democrats, be a cautionary one. As Republicans fought the culture war through Clinton, hammering him on his sexual peccadilloes and thundering for a reawakening of family values, his administration's popularity only rose—just as the initial spate of attacks on Palin's right-wing values and family choices rallied the Republican base and gave the McCain ticket a bump in the polls.

By fixating on what they didn't like about him as a person, Republicans underestimated Clinton's skill as a politician. Election Day 1998—after a fierce culture-war campaign that included fights with Clinton over gay adoption and attacks over Monica—saw a huge backlash in which Clinton's supposedly beleaguered party picked up seats. That night, the triumphant Clinton team partied until 2:30 a.m. with wine and cigars. Let's not see that scene repeated in November with ice wine and moose jerky.

Eve Fairbanks

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Buckeye Boondoggle

The truth about John McCain and those DHL workers.

In the weeks before his address to the Democratic convention, pundits and politicos alike were of the seemingly unanimous opinion that Barack Obama was being too timid toward John McCain. Clearly, none of these critics had been to Ohio. Since mid-August, the Obama campaign has been on the air in the Buckeye State with radio and TV attack ads that are much harsher than any of the harsh words Obama had for McCain in his convention speech. "In Washington, John McCain helped pave the way for foreign-owned DHL to take over an American shipping company," an announcer says in the television spot. "McCain's campaign manager was lead lobbyist for the deal. Now, thousands of Ohio jobs at risk." Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO has been complementing the Obama ads with a mailing to Ohio voters alleging that "McCain helped cut a deal that sent over 8,000 Ohio jobs to a foreign-owned company."

The attacks refer to an air park in the southwestern Ohio town of Wilmington, which the German-owned delivery company DHL acquired as part of its purchase of Airborne Express in 2003. After using Wilmington as its North American air-freight hub for the past five years, DHL announced on May 28 that it was outsourcing its North American air cargo operations to UPS, which operates a hub in Louisville, Kentucky—resulting in the likely loss of thousands of jobs in Wilmington. As for McCain's connection, he played a role in getting DHL's purchase of Airborne through Congress, and his campaign manager, Rick Davis, was hired by DHL to lobby on behalf of the deal. All of which has created a perfect storm of political trouble for McCain in a battleground state that could very well determine the next president. It's little wonder, then, that, when Davis's role in the DHL deal was revealed by the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* in early August, Obama campaign manager David Plouffe deemed it "the most important development of the entire campaign this week," adding that "John McCain can become an emblem for people about what is wrong with Washington."

But the story of the DHL deal—and McCain's role in it—is less an emblem of what's wrong with Washington than an example of what happens when a complicated tale of globalization gets filtered through the prism of a white-hot presidential race. Because, in reality, McCain played a largely peripheral—and, from all available evidence, principled—role in approving the DHL deal; and, what's more, the deal itself was once considered a boon to the Ohio community it now threatens to destroy. But, in the current presidential campaign, both of these realities are being largely ignored. And for that, it turns out, John McCain has no one to blame but himself.

With runways of 9,000 and nearly 11,000 feet set on 2,200 acres, the Wilmington air park is one of the largest privately owned airports in the United States. But, when Airborne Express was its owner, the airport was hardly being used to its full potential. Mired in a distant (and perennial) third place in the U.S. express delivery market, behind FedEx and UPS, Airborne Express was, in the assessment of one industry analyst, "always teetering on the brink of financial collapse." And so, when DHL—which had a booming international air express business but a marginal presence in the United States—decided that it wanted to compete with FedEx and UPS in the American market, Airborne Express was a ripe target for takeover. In 2003, Deutsche Post World Net, the German company that owns DHL, offered $1.05 billion to purchase Airborne Express and its assets—including the Wilmington air park.

In Wilmington, news of the offer was greeted with cautious optimism. Airborne had been a good corporate citizen for nearly 25 years, but it wasn't exactly a company on the move. Deutsche Post World Net, by contrast, was a global behemoth with tens of thousands of employees in 220 countries and annual sales of $46 billion. And, while the fact that it was a German company gave people some pause, its foreign ownership was viewed as an opportunity as well. Indeed, there were some in the sleepy city of 12,000 who believed that DHL would usher in boom times there. "We started to envision that Wilmington would become an international port of entry with freight and maybe even passengers some day," recalls Wilmington Mayor David Raizk, a rare Democratic elected official in an otherwise staunchly Republican town. "Planes were going to be landing here from Hong Kong and Europe; that would lead to hotels and restaurants and the potential for trade and growth. What was there to be negative about if you believe globalization works? This was a perfect opportunity to create a global economy right here in Wilmington, Ohio. Where was the downside? We were all thinking, 'My gosh, how much more can we dream?'"

On Capitol Hill, the response was a little different. Although Ohio's congressional delegation was ultimately comfortable with DHL's acquisition of Airborne, and even organized labor gave the deal its tacit blessing, FedEx and UPS, fearful of a newly competitive DHL, tried to scuttle it. Because U.S. law prohibits foreign entities from owning more than 25 percent of an American air carrier, DHL planned to spin off Airborne Express's airline into an independent company called ABX Air. But FedEx and UPS contended that since almost all of ABX Air's business would come from shipping freight for DHL, the airline would be effectively foreign-owned. The argument evidently struck a chord with Alaska Senator Ted Stevens—he of the Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage, where both FedEx and UPS have major hubs—who, in April 2003, inserted a provision into a supplemental spending bill for the Iraq war that would have jeopardized DHL's acquisition of Airborne by further narrowing the ownership criteria for air carriers seeking military contracts. Under pressure from the White House and a number of members of Congress not to lard a war-spending bill with provisions unrelated to the war, Stevens submitted a revised bill that slashed the more stringent criteria and called for an administrative law judge to assess carriers' effective U.S. ownership. The subsequent court ruling in December cleared the way for ABX to operate as DHL had envisioned.

McCain was one of those senators who opposed Stevens's original measure. As McCain explained in a press release at the time, "If there are legitimate reasons to change the criteria for determining U.S.-citizen control of air cargo carriers, these considerations should be clearly articulated and debated in the normal legislative process—not inserted into a non-amendable vehicle in the dead of night." McCain's statement was consistent with his long-standing opposition to earmarks and other extraneous amendments. What's more, his opposition to Stevens's amendment was consistent with his long-standing opposition to Stevens himself. "Just on a philosophical level, he would have been instinctively on the other side of Ted Stevens," says one McCain associate. "His instinct would have been to walk into the room, see where Stevens had put himself, and immediately go in the opposite direction."

But what of Davis's lobbying for DHL, for which his firm was paid $185,000 in 2003? Did it influence McCain, who that same year installed Davis as president of

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REBUILD AFTER METH

The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.

- *Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.*[1]
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Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

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- *Treatment is available, and it works.*
- *Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.*[4]

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

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American Society of Addiction Medicine
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National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

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the non-profit group he'd established to promote campaign finance reform (and keep himself in the political spotlight)? There's no evidence that it did. "I don't know how to say it without sounding like I'm in the tank, but I never once saw the guy do anything for anybody," says Ken Nahigian, who was a lawyer on McCain's Commerce Committee staff at the time of the DHL deal. "It's just against how he operates. Everyone has this turnstile of lobbyists coming in to talk to him. McCain's never been that way." Indeed, if McCain were going to be swayed by lobbying, it's just as likely he would have been swayed in the other direction, given his long-standing friendship with—and the thousands of dollars in political contributions he's received from—Frederick Smith, the chairman of FedEx.

In other words, McCain's opposition to Stevens's amendment—and his tacit support of the DHL deal—appears to have been entirely principled and even predictable. Which makes you wonder why DHL felt the need to hire Davis in the first place. "Davis took advantage of the situation and said to DHL, 'I can help you here,' when, in fact, they didn't need any help," says the McCain associate. "That was the racket he was running." (Davis did not respond to interview requests.)

The fact that all this has now come back to haunt McCain is merely symptomatic of the larger problem his campaign has with lobbyists. Despite his record in the Senate of having little tolerance for lobbyists—"He'd go out of his way to not do what certain lobbyists were telling him to do," says Nahigian—McCain's current presidential campaign is crawling with them. And, when they have lobbied on issues that suddenly pop up in the news, those issues become a lot more complicated for McCain than they otherwise would have been. Witness the case of McCain foreign policy adviser Randy Scheunemann having lobbied for the Georgian government.

McCain seems to have forgotten a crucial lesson he claimed to have learned back in the 1980s: that, when it comes to political scandal, appearances matter. During the Keating Five affair—in which he and four other senators were accused of improperly interfering in a federal investigation of a prominent contributor—McCain was cleared of any wrongdoing but was criticized for "poor judgment." As he later said, "The thing I learned was that it's not only impropriety that counts, it's the appearance that is just as important."

Now, almost two decades later, the DHL story is forcing McCain to learn that lesson all over again. Were it not for Davis's lobbying, the closing of the Wilmington air park might still have been an issue in the presidential campaign, but it would have been an issue that both candidates were forced to address, rather than an issue that one candidate is using as a cudgel against the other. And, even though the particulars of Obama's attacks on McCain over the DHL deal are unfair—the group FactCheck.org goes so far as to label Obama's ads "misleading" and "unsubstantiated"—they are fair in a cosmic sense of sorts: While McCain was hardly alone in failing to foresee the catastrophe that would eventually befall Wilmington because of DHL, it shouldn't have taken much foresight to realize that, in surrounding himself with lobbyists, he would leave his campaign exposed to the kind of attacks Obama is now unleashing. Defending himself and his candidate from those attacks, Davis has accused the Obama campaign of "playing politics with [air-park workers'] jobs." That's true. But it's a game Obama can play thanks to Davis and McCain.

Jason Zengerle

Village Idiocy

Enough with small-town triumphalism.

Wasilla, Alaska, is currently the most famous small town in America, thanks to its former mayor Sarah Palin. A healthy part of her appeal is that she seems to embody small-town values, nurtured in Wasilla and America's other hamlets and burgs. As she said in her firecracker acceptance speech, small-town people live lives of "honesty, sincerity, and dignity" and "do some of the hardest work in America."

Palin was tapping into a widespread belief that small-town America represents the country at large. In April 2008, as the Democratic primary contest ground through Pennsylvania, Gerald Seib of *The Wall Street Journal* declared that "Rural and small-town voters are the best indicators of whether a candidate is connecting with the values of Middle America. 'They are America,' says Peter Hart, a Democratic pollster. . . . 'If you can speak to [them], then you relate to the rest of America.'"

But the idea that we are a nation of small towns is fundamentally incorrect. The real America isn't found in cities or suburbs or small towns, but in the metropolitan areas or "metros" that bring all these places into economic and social union. Palin's positioning may appeal to a certain nostalgia that Americans have about small-town life, but the Manichean dichotomy of city versus small town (not to mention "urban" candidate versus "rural" one) no longer describes the radically connected and interdependent way Americans live and work.

America's small-town romance has a long, distinguished history, which perhaps explains why it has outlived its accuracy by at least 100 years. Thomas Jefferson was our nation's most influential exponent of the idea that cities are un-American. "I view the great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man," he said.

But the 1910 census was the last one in which rural Americans represented a majority of the population; these days, we've become a thoroughly metropolitan nation. Two-thirds of our population lives in the top 100 metropolitan areas, and 84 percent of Americans live in all 363 metros. Being in a metro means being tied to someplace else; the Census Bureau defines metropolitan areas as a city of 50,000 or more, plus the adjacent counties that have close social and economic ties to the urban core.

In metros, unlike mythical small towns, no place is self-contained or splendidly independent. Metros are tied together by highways and rail lines, and people cross local boundaries and state lines every day to shop, go to a doctor's office or a museum, and especially to go to work. The suburbs as a whole have more jobs than cities: Just under half of all commutes within metropolitan areas are from suburb to suburb, and only 19 percent are old-fashioned suburb-to-central-city trips. If you track commuting flows in the 14-county Chicago metropolitan region (as Brookings has done), the result looks like macaroni dumped on the map.

In fact, even the "small town" of Wasilla, Alaska is fast becoming a satellite of the state's largest city. Wasilla is nestled in the Matanuska-Susitna, or Mat-Su, borough (boroughs are Alaska's equivalent of counties), and the borough is part of the Anchorage metropolitan area. Around one-third of the workers in the borough make the 50-minute commute to Anchorage to earn their living. When she's not in Juneau during the Alaska legislative session, Sarah Palin is one of those workers.

More and more small towns like Wasilla are becoming part of the metro orbit. In fact, according to the Census Bureau, half of all "rural" residents live

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within the boundaries of a metropolitan area. (The classification of an area as "urban" or "rural" is based on population density, not the extent of economic ties to other places.) The census doesn't use the terms "exurb," or "suburb," so it's hard to know how best to describe low-density places within metros, beyond saying that these places are tied to the urban core, however much residents might object to the fact.

THINKING OF the United States as a nation of small towns fundamentally misunderstands our economy, which is disproportionately driven by metros. Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter, one of the world's foremost gurus on economic competitiveness, has suggested that there is no such thing as the U.S. economy, but rather a network of interlinked metropolitan economies. The top 100 metropolitan areas are home to 68 percent of America's jobs and are the origin of 75 percent of the nation's gross domestic product.

Metros are economic powerhouses precisely because of the way they differ from the idealized small town. Adam Smith noted in *The Wealth of Nations* that "the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market" and that larger markets (like those currently found in metros) enable workers to specialize and work more efficiently. The easy flow of ideas that drives economic growth also tends to happen in metros. The largest metropolitan areas house 76 percent of "knowledge economy" jobs (such as software developers), 81 percent of R&D employment, and 67 percent of major U.S. research universities. Just six metros accounted for 64 percent of the nation's venture capital funding. It turns out that the genuine interaction of people in the same physical space is not replaceable by the Internet, telecommuting, or video conferencing.

A politician who ignores this economic and demographic reality risks making serious policy mistakes, such as misdirecting the public investments that we need to survive in an era of intense global competition. For example, self-sufficient small towns don't need mass transit and high-speed rail networks, but interconnected metros do. Germany and France have already constructed fast rail connections between their major metropolitan areas, radically altering the movement of people and the facilitation of business. China is building the most sophisticated network of ports and freight hubs in the world. A nation of small towns doesn't recognize the need for these kinds of investments.

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People's longing for small towns is an understandable fantasy. Small towns seem like slower, saner havens in an overly connected, frenetic world, places where a blackberry is an ingredient in jam. But metros, not small towns, are where our economy is, where our population is, and where our country's future is.

They may even be where our values are. Early twentieth-century sociologists wrote essay upon essay warning against the anomie and isolation of urban life when our metropolitan areas were new, loud, dirty, and frightening. But a few decades later, Jane Jacobs and Herbert Gans described the interdependence and solidarity of people in Greenwich Village and Levittown. Metros have increasingly come to symbolize connectedness—and connectedness, also expressed as a sense of community, is a powerful American value. The real lesson of metro culture is that values (like people) can't be constricted by municipal borders or labels on a map. Americans take our values with us, in high-rises, duplexes, McMansions, trailer parks, and tract home developments across the country. America is much bigger than its small towns.

JENNIFER BRADLEY AND BRUCE KATZ

Jennifer Bradley is a senior research associate with, and Bruce Katz is the founding director of, the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program.

Red Dusk

The Rosenberg bombshell.

As both doctrine and praxis, to borrow from the old vernacular, communism may have been the most vicious phenomenon of the twentieth century. Part of the viciousness was its canny competence in purporting to be the chalice of hope for mankind. Nazism was also cruel, very cruel and industrially proficient in the mechanics of mass death. But it had no pretensions to universal humanitarianism. It was a master race ideology. Given this undisguised basic principle, its enemies and victims were evident at the near-start and they were by definition counted in the multitudes. Perhaps that is one reason why Hitler's demented regime lasted a bare dozen years.

But the world is not quite done with the epigones of Leninism, some still governing in a few benighted, if enormous jurisdictions and others still fighting, poor deluded folk, in the mountains. How much longer can a lie like this last?

In all, communism has slaughtered well over 100 million, and still counting. How many souls its rule also ruined is harder to know. A new book, *The Forsaken* by Tim Tzouliadis, the existence of which I first noticed in a review by the myth-breaking American historian Ronald Radosh in *National Review*, unveils a wholly new topic: the deadly fate of the thousands of American communists and sympathizers who went to the Soviet Union to build socialism. For many, this was another form of *aliyah*, except not to the Jewish homeland that turned out to be a success, but to the fatherland of labor that ended in political, ideological, economic, demographic, and ethical ruin, not to mention the gulag.

In America and in other Western societies, however, there still remain coteries of intellectuals and other high-minded people who have trouble absorbing the simplest historic truths, truths which ordinary workers in highly ideological Labour England, say, have had absolutely no difficulties absorbing. Even more so among unionized workers in the United States. The blindness of these meta-minds does not quite absolve Stalin of his crimes—but it willfully looks away from those of Castro or Che, who still hold a special place in the hearts of people calling themselves progressives. The West never quite focused on the enormities of the Mao regime, so, to many of these revolutionaries, the worst atrocity of twentieth-century China was the Japanese rape of Nanking. Mao is merely a cultural icon created by Andy Warhol and sanitized by the Chairman's presence over fireplaces in the houses of many magnates.

LOU BEACH

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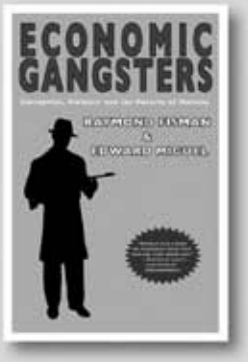

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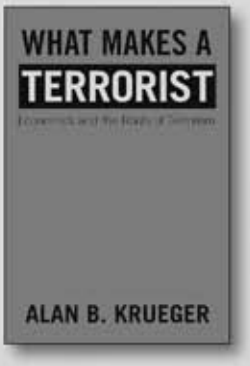

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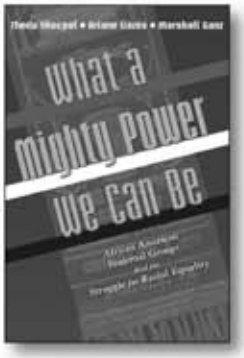

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Tzouliadis and Radosh etch the indifference of the *biens pensants* scrupulously. In any case, they no longer deny Stalin's crimes. They compare them to the crimes of others . . . favorably. The exemplary master of this distorted moral relativism is George Steiner, thought of otherwise, if anyone still thinks of him at all, as a prophet of moral absolutism. You know the type: a person who cannot tolerate an Israeli lifting a gun. But, for his own sentimental purposes, Steiner does make comparisons: "[T]o infer," he writes in criticism of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, "that the Soviet terror is as hideous as Hitlerism is not only a brutal simplification but a moral indecency."

Last week, a bunker-buster hit the carefully preserved world of the post-fellow-traveling fellow-traveler. No longer advertising the kindnesses of Stalin, as Lillian Hellman used to do, this strange but numerous social type had clung to the innocence and idealism of Stalin's sympathizers. They still think Alger Hiss innocent, Dalton Trumbo honest, Hellman a heroine, Elia Kazan a rat. In this world, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sent to their deaths pure as the driven snow, their only sin being belief in . . . well, in what did they actually believe? In Marx, in Lenin, in Stalin, in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, devout, deluded, and disloyal to the country in which they lived.

There is a whole culture in America that has believed the innocence of the Rosenbergs as doctrine and dogma. The texts of this culture are not scrupulous histories because such histories would undermine its beliefs. They are, instead, one novel and one play, fiction being more amenable to false history, both these cases being tales of the Rosenbergs' innocence. The narrative is E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, a best-selling book of the 1970s. The drama is Tony Kushner's phantasmagoric *Angels in America*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and features Ethel haunting the last days of Roy Cohn, who had been on the legal team prosecuting the Rosenbergs and boasted in his autobiography of convincing the judge to sentence them to death, an ugly boast about an ugly deed by an ugly man. The position of these literary works tells you something about the culture in which they still shine.

Ethel and Julius Rosenberg after their 1951 conviction.

So what is the bunker-buster? It is Sam Roberts's September 11 *New York Times* interview with Morton Sobell, a co-defendant of the Rosenbergs who had also been found guilty and served more than 18 years in Alcatraz. In the nearly six decades since the beginning of the case, Sobell had maintained his innocence. Suddenly, he admits the great lie of his life. He is guilty, he concedes. And so was Julius. There are still doubts about what exactly Ethel did or did not do. Richard Nixon apparently told a confidante in 1983 that this was, in fact, the case and that, had President Eisenhower known about the vagaries in her situation, he would have commuted the sentence on the grounds of "tainted evidence." But the evidence of a widely netted Soviet atomic spy ring with Julius at its apex is incontrovertible. So incontrovertible that now even Julius's long-crusading sons concede the ugly truth about their father.

I wonder what the folks around *The Nation* were feeling when their underlying sense of postwar America essentially collapsed last week. And what Victor Navasky, its *pater familias*, is feeling, too. He has been the cheerleader of the "everybody was innocent" school in American sentimental thought about communism and its fellow-travelers. Hiss was innocent. The Rosenbergs were innocent. It was all a search for witches, as Arthur Miller tried to tell us in *The Crucible*. Except that there were

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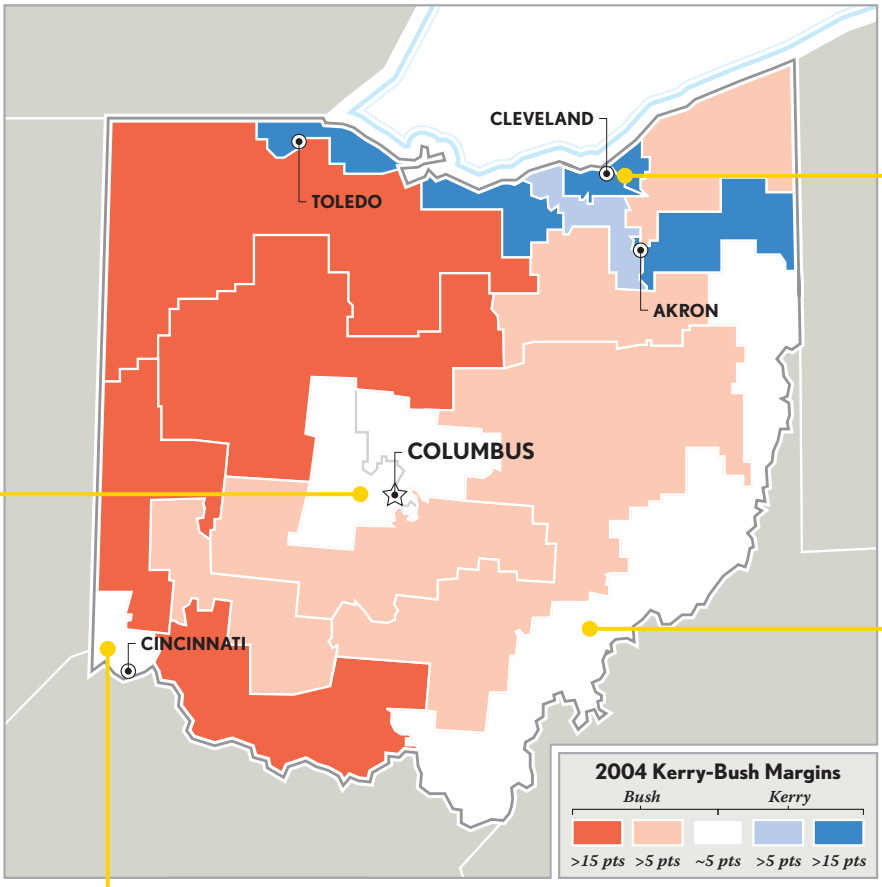
How Ohio Will Be Won

Ohio remains ground zero in the battle for the electoral college. An Obama win in the Buckeye State would all but clinch victory for him, while a McCain win would leave Obama scrambling to flip several Bush states—such as Iowa, Colorado, and New Mexico—at once. Here is a look at the battlegrounds within the battleground, where the state will be won or lost. *Nate Silver*

The 12th and 15th districts around Columbus play to the strengths of both candidates. Sarah Palin should generally do well in the middle of the state, but the huge student populations around Columbus are a boon to Obama. The candidate who wins these regions will likely take the state.



Obama will clobber McCain in Cleveland, perhaps by as much as 85–15 in the urban OH-11. It's a question, then, of how much he can multiply that result by turning out his vote. Having a Democratic secretary of state in Ohio—an advantage the Democrats did not have in 2004 and 2000—could make a big difference.

Kerry lost the 6th district, near the West Virginia border, by just two points in 2004. But Obama underperformed there during the primaries and will likely do so again in November. It's an inexpensive area to advertise in, though, and he may be able to limit McCain's margin by saturating the airwaves.

While the borderlands around Kentucky look bad for Obama, an exception may be OH-1, which covers Cincinnati and Hamilton County. It has historically voted Republican but might be prone to flip given the party's unpopularity in the state and vigorous Democratic get-out-the-vote efforts. If Obama wins Ohio, he'll probably need to turn this district blue by five points.

no witches in seventeenth-century New England, not even in Salem. But there were communists who were disloyal to their country and communist spies who acted against their country.

Ronald Radosh has been doing his unpleasant truth-telling in these pages for more than two decades. It was here that he (and Sol Stern) published their first work on the guilt of the Rosenbergs, with proper doubts about the extent of Ethel's culpability. It was here that Allen Weinstein published his first conclusions about Alger Hiss. Both pieces of work are now considered conclusive. But Victor Navasky dissented. He couldn't see the facts when they were put before his very eyes—"fragments," "ephemera," and "ambiguous intercepts," he judged the evidence. He had a gig on the American left, and, for its own psychological reasons, the left needed to have its illusions sustained. Charming Victor, he could still be counted on to preserve the old lies—and his role wasn't without consequences. He ensnared suckers into believing the lies, he lent the lies a sheen of scholarly credibility.

Do Catholic universities still employ professors who believe that Galileo was in error? I doubt it. Navasky is the George T. Delacorte Professor of Journalism at the Columbia University School of Journalism. Isn't it time for him to start worrying about when dogma becomes lie? The innocence of the Rosenbergs is now exposed as false. Will the Delacorte Professor still say it isn't so?

Martin Peretz

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Liar's Poker

Why McCain just can't tell the truth.

JONATHAN CHAIT

About a week after John McCain's campaign unveiled a vice-presidential nominee who incessantly boasted about her decision to turn down federal funding for a notoriously pointless bridge ("I told Congress 'thanks, but no thanks' on that Bridge to Nowhere"), the press corps began to notice that Sarah Palin had, in fact, vigorously championed the project until it was no longer tenable. Political fibs, even brazen ones such as this, are hardly unprecedented. What happened next, though, was somewhat unusual. Despite having its claim exposed in nearly every media outlet, the McCain campaign continued to assert it anyway, day after day, dozens of times in all. It was as if Bill Clinton had persisted in his claim that he did not have sexual relations with that woman even after the appearance of the semen-stained dress.

But what happened after *that* was even more unusual, and possibly without precedent: McCain's supporters simply suggested that the truth or falsity of their statements didn't matter. McCain spokesman Brian Rogers said this to *Politico* about the increased media scrutiny of the campaign's factual claims: "We're running a campaign to win. And we're not too concerned about what the media filter tries to say about it." Republican strategist John Feehery made the point even more bluntly, telling *The Washington Post*: "The more *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* go after Sarah Palin, the better off she is, because there's a bigger truth out there, and the bigger truths are: She's new, she's popular in Alaska, and she is an insurgent." Then, he added, "As long as those are out there, these little facts don't really matter."

Here we have the distilled essence of the McCain campaign's ethos: Perception is reality. Facts don't matter. McCain has presented himself as the grizzled champion of timeworn values. But the defining trait of his candidacy turns out to be a postmodern disdain for truth. How could McCain—a man widely regarded, not so long ago, as one of the country's most honor-bound politicians, and therefore an unusually honest one—have descended to this ignominious low? Part of the answer is that McCain is simply doing what works—and there is good reason to believe that his campaign's strategy of persistent dishonesty will pay dividends come November 4. But part of the explanation for all this recent dishonesty may lie, oddly enough, in McCain's legendary sense of honor.

No presidential candidate has ever gone through an entire election without stretching the truth. Certainly, Barack Obama is not totally innocent. Last March, Obama said that McCain "wants to continue a war in Iraq perhaps as long as one hundred years," when in fact McCain said that he would favor an indefinite *peaceful* military presence. (Obama was repeatedly called on this distortion by the press, and subsequently stopped saying it.) He has accused McCain of helping to permit a corporate takeover in Ohio that has led to the threat of layoffs—a literally true claim that inaccurately implies that the takeover *caused* the problem. He has also accused McCain of favoring nearly $4 billion in new tax breaks for Big Oil—literally true, but misleading, insofar as McCain is offering tax cuts to corporations in general, not Big Oil in particular.

But McCain's untruths, in their frequency and their audacity, defy any modern historical precedent. He has been concocting falsehoods for months on end, all of which serve a clear political purpose. Last summer, Obama—on the heels of a *New York Times* report that the Bush administration in 2005 had canceled at the last minute a snatch-and-grab operation targeting Osama bin Laden's lieutenants in Pakistan—pledged to follow through on any actionable intelligence against Al Qaeda. After Obama's nomination became likely, McCain—then trying to portray Obama as dangerously naïve and uninformed—accused him of having "once suggested bombing our ally, Pakistan." Obama had not said anything about bombing. His speech merely conveyed his support for small, special operations missions—the types of missions, incidentally, that the Bush administration has since undertaken.

During Obama's overseas trip this summer, he called off a meeting with wounded troops at a military hospital after the Pentagon told him that the trip might run afoul of a policy against visiting soldiers in the course of campaigning. A McCain ad accused him of canceling the meeting because he learned that cameras couldn't accompany him. (In fact, the press had never been scheduled to come along.)

Just last week, McCain attacked Obama for proposing to cut defense spending. "During the primary, he told a liberal advocacy group that he'd cut defense spending by tens of billions of dollars," charged the GOP nominee. "He promised them he would, quote, 'slow our development of future combat systems.'" Actually, Obama had pledged to cut tens of billions of dollars in *wasteful* military spending (he also favored increasing the size of the military). Worse, almost any listener hearing this claim would come away thinking Obama was proposing to cut funding for weapons systems in development. In reality, Obama had promised to slow the development of a specific project called "Future Combat Systems," a controversial program. Indeed, McCain *himself* had proposed eliminating this very program in July.

McCain has endlessly accused Obama of favoring tax increases of all kinds—on middle-class families, on low-income workers, on millions of small-business owners, on electricity, on the sale of homes—that he does not favor at all. He's also in the habit of wildly misrepresenting Obama's energy plan. "My opponent doesn't want nuclear power, he doesn't want us to drill offshore, and the other day he mentioned that what we need to do is inflate our tires," he has said, adding, "that's a public-service announcement, not an energy policy." Over the summer, McCain distributed tire gauges labeled Obama's Energy Plan. Obviously, Obama does have an energy plan, and in fact favors expanding nuclear power. McCain has also preposterously accused Obama of opposing electric cars. A McCain ad described Obama's position as "No to the electric car," simply because

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Obama had (justifiably) ridiculed McCain's proposal of a $300 million reward for anyone who could create a substantially improved electric car.

Back in May, McCain quoted Obama as having said of Hillary Clinton, "Like she's on the duck blind every Sunday, packin' a six-shooter!" McCain followed that story with an acid quip about how ignorant Obama was for thinking ducks are hunted with six-shooters. This was the kind of devastating detail that had stuck to Democratic nominees before, endlessly circulating on talk radio and cable news, revealing them to be pretentious phonies out of touch with working-class life. But McCain was twisting Obama's line in a crucial way. Obama had actually said: "She's talking like she's Annie Oakley. Hillary Clinton's out there like she's on the duck blind every Sunday. She's packing a six-shooter." Two different things—going on the duck blind, packing a six-shooter. Not only did the press not call McCain on this distortion, but news accounts actually repeated his misquote as fact.

Indeed, McCain's consistent pattern of distortion received little attention until September, when the campaign embarked upon a flurry of prevarications. First, Palin introduced herself to the public as an opponent of the Bridge to Nowhere, even though she had supported the project until it could no longer be sustained (and even then took the federal money but redirected it). McCain actually went on to boast that she had accepted *no* federal earmarks, when in fact she had requested $453 million.

McCain also ludicrously called Obama's metaphor for McCain's policies ("lipstick on a pig") a personal attack on Palin. And the McCain campaign ran an advertisement falsely accusing Obama of having voted for a bill calling for sex education in kindergarten. (This was an echo of a smear that McCain chief strategist Steve Schmidt had used in a 1996 congressional campaign.) Factcheck.org called the ad "simply false" and explained that the bill required age-appropriate instruction for subjects like teaching younger children about avoiding pedophiles, not, as the ad said, "learning about sex before learning to read." By this point it had become clear even to many of McCain's admirers that there was a pattern at work: He was running a campaign that was unusually, perhaps even uniquely, dishonest.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Considered from a purely amoral point of view, McCain's strategy has much to recommend it. His opponent is a narrow target. Obama has two principal political weaknesses: his race and his lack of experience. McCain, to his credit, has shied away from race-based attacks, and he has de-emphasized experience since selecting Palin. On the policy front, McCain faces even more of a disadvantage. He's defending a set of proposals nearly indistinguishable from those of an incumbent with the highest disapproval ratings in the history of polling. McCain got some traction attacking Obama for supporting a timetable for withdrawal, until the Iraqi prime minister endorsed essentially the same idea. Obama, like Bill Clinton, has taken few positions that might hurt him in the election. On taxes, for instance, Obama favors larger rate cuts for the vast majority of Americans, leaving McCain in the unenviable position of defending (vis-à-vis his opponent) higher taxes for the middle class and vastly lower taxes for the very rich. McCain, in short, stands little chance running against Obama. Running against a pretend Obama who favors broad tax hikes and opposes any new energy sources naturally seems more promising.

McCain does run some risk of a backlash. After years of portraying him as a uniquely honorable figure in American politics, the national press corps has started to take note of his brazen distortions, a development that may threaten his most precious asset. But we should consider an alternate possibility. Suppose that McCain has committed himself, with the Palin pick, to running a campaign centered around mobilizing the Republican base. He has enjoyed clear success with this since the Palin pick, attracting larger crowds, drawing higher fund-raising totals, and even seeing dramatically higher numbers of voters identifying themselves as Republicans in polls.

If this is McCain's strategy, then a bunch of news reports debunking his claims isn't going to hurt. Indeed it may even help. Last February, political scientists Brendan Nyhan of Duke and Jason Reifler of Georgia State published the results of an experiment designed to test the effects of political untruths. The results would unsettle any idealist. The first conclusion they found was that lies work. When subjects were confronted with an untrue political claim (President Bush banned stem-cell research; weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq) respondents naturally moved toward those positions. When the lie was corrected, however, the effect of the untruth in moving opinions largely remained. The truth, in other words, is no antidote for a lie.

Their second conclusion was even more disturbing. Subjects who identified as politically conservative were not only immune to the effects of having a lie corrected, the correction made them even more likely to believe a lie. So, for instance, one group of conservative subjects was presented with a news story that depicted President Bush claiming weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq. A second group of conservatives was presented with the same thing, along with a paragraph noting that Bush's statement was untrue. The second group was more likely than the first to believe that Iraq possessed WMDs. The very fact of the press challenging their beliefs seems to have made conservatives more likely to embrace them. If this finding is broadly correct, then the media's newfound willingness to fact-check McCain will only succeed in rallying the GOP base to his side.

But wait. Those of us who have admired McCain are not used to analyzing his actions in purely amoral terms. This is a man with a history of true heroism who takes honor seriously. What happened to him?

The McCain campaign and its sympathizers have offered one semi-acknowledgment in public. According to their theory, McCain tried to run a high-road campaign, but was ignored by the press and rebuffed by Obama. McCain, complained his former aide, Dan Schnur, "had a poverty tour and nobody covered it." (McCain's tour did get some coverage, but not the commanding attention McCain hoped for, possibly because he had no actual poverty proposals to accompany it.) Likewise, McCain cites his unrequited offer to hold joint town halls as evidence of his good faith. "I think the tone of this whole campaign would've been very different," he said recently, "if Senator Obama had accepted my request for us to appear at town hall meetings all over America." McCain's proposal of joint town halls was salutary, but it wasn't an act of charity—the obvious purpose was to draw Obama into a forum where McCain excels. Even if McCain did make the offer out of a pure-hearted desire to lift the public discourse, Obama's refusal hardly justifies

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embarking upon a sustained campaign of slander. McCain's rationale is a bit like saying your rejection from law school forced you to turn to a life of crime.

Any attempt to determine McCain's true motives is necessarily pure speculation. It's possible that McCain has convinced himself to actually believe the lies he has been telling. But here's a more likely explanation: All this dishonesty can be understood not as a betrayal of McCain's sense of honor but, in an odd way, as a fulfillment of it.

McCain's deep investment in his own honor can drive him to do honorable things, but it can also allow him to believe that anything he does must be honorable. Thus the moralistic, crusading tone McCain brings to almost every cause he joins. In 2000 and afterward, McCain came to despise George W. Bush and Karl Rove. During his more recent primary campaign, McCain thought the same of front-runner Mitt Romney. Not surprisingly, Romney was the target of McCain's most unfair primary attack—an inaccurate claim that he favored a withdrawal timetable in Iraq.

In time, when Bush's support became necessary for his second presidential campaign, McCain reconciled himself to his former rival—and even to Rove, whom he has reportedly taken on as an outside adviser. More recently, he apparently changed his view of Romney. Now, Obama is the villain. "The contempt that many McCain aides hold for Barack Obama," *The Atlantic*'s Marc Ambinder wrote this summer, "rivals the contempt that McCain held for Mitt Romney a year ago." As *Time* reported, "McCain and his aides now view Obama with the same level of contempt they once reserved for tobacco-company executives, corrupt lawmakers and George W. Bush. They have convinced themselves that Obama is not honorable, that he does not love his country as much as himself."

The pattern here is perfectly clear. McCain has contempt for *anybody* who stands between him and the presidency. McCain views himself as the ultimate patriot. He loves his country so much that he cannot let it fall into the hands of an unworthy rival. (They all turn out to be unworthy.) Viewed in this way, doing whatever it takes to win is not an act of selfishness but an act of patriotism. McCain tells lies every day and authorizes lying on his behalf, and he probably knows it. But I would guess—and, again, guessing is all we can do—that in his mind he is acting honorably. As he might put it, there is a bigger truth out there. ◆

Visible Hands

The surrender of free-market capitalism.

IRWIN STELZER

When Hank Paulson, a successful investment banker turned Republican treasury secretary, caps his career by nationalizing two financial institutions so large that even Norman Thomas in his socialist heyday would have paused before taking them onto the government's balance sheet, and a conservative central banker agrees to bail out an insurance company to the tune of $85 billion, you know that a fundamental change is underway. The day when that engine of capitalism, the financial market, was allowed to operate more or less unimpeded by government has passed. We are entering an era in which a high tolerance for risk is being replaced by the eager embrace of regulation, and where the overriding imperative, efficiency, has been replaced by an increasing desire for equity.

True, we have long had a Federal Reserve System that sets short-term interest rates; true, the institutions that have been nationalized—mortgage giants Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae—have always been "government-sponsored enterprises," privately owned but with implicit federal guarantees; true, too, the government has long insured depositors at savings institutions against loss. But never before has Washington so systematically socialized the risks undertaken by the one-time masters of the universe, Wall Street's investment bankers, who until now more or less controlled the allocation of capital among its several capitalist claimants. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that capitalism as we have known it is no more, and that a New Capitalism is in the process of creation.

"Capitalism without failure is like religion without sin," notes Allan Meltzer, one of the nation's most astute economists. Perhaps that was once true. But the New Capitalism has little room for the pain of failure. A host of measures have been introduced to make it easier for families delinquent in their mortgage payments to stay in their homes, an act of compassion (as some would put it), or encouragement of profligate sinners to sin again (as the Old Capitalists would say). The Old Capitalists mourn the lost era of individual responsibility even as they acquiesce to it, for there is no support for a return to the harsher regime they favored, in which government did little to mitigate the pain of poor management, bad judgment, or just plain bad luck.

Far more significant than its new attitude toward individual failure is the New Capitalism's fear of recession. At the very first hint of an economic slowdown, Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board—and ostensibly a conservative—eased monetary policy. He did not wait to determine whether a major downturn was brewing or for growth to turn negative. He was not willing to risk the sort of mild recession that has peppered the post–World War II period. Rather, a risk appeared, and the Fed felt it necessary to lower interest rates—never mind that such a move would drive down the dollar, and therefore drive up oil prices.

Under the Old Capitalism, the authorities in charge of monetary and fiscal policy correctly assumed that the public understood the ups and downs of the business cycle and was willing to endure the moderately bad times that often followed the very good ones. But the tolerable level of pain and risk has shrunk, so the central bankers who are supposed to ensure that our currency holds its value subordinated that goal to avoiding the pain of a bursting bubble. We may not be a nation of whiners, as Phil Gramm believes, but neither are we as tolerant of recession as we were only recently.

Nor is the New Capitalism willing to tolerate the risk of systemic upheaval. In the old days, we were, by and large, willing to let financial institutions ride the deregulation wave that affected so many industries, beginning with the successful deregulation of the airlines in 1978 and running through the electric, gas, and telephone industries thereafter. In 1999, banks were freed to expand into the securities and insurance businesses, from which they had previously been barred by the Glass-Steagall Act—

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even though this increased the risk that they might fail. And, if they failed, they failed; depositors were protected. As for those consumers with funds at uninsured investment banks, the stock exchanges developed defenses like the Securities Investor Protection Corporation. No government intervention was thought necessary.

But, recently, Bernanke, Paulson, and President Bush (a long-time and vocal defender of free-market capitalism) decided that some investment banks—not banks in which ordinary folks maintain deposits—are too interconnected to fail. Let Bear Stearns go under and all of the companies with which it does business might be brought down with it. Failures of this sort were tolerable under the Old Capitalism—remember the collapse of Drexel Burnham and the downfall of its guiding genius, Mike Milken?—but now they provoke high anxiety. So the government organized a bailout, using taxpayer funds to prevent creditors of Bear Stearns from losing money, protecting the companies it did business with, and saving shareholders from a complete wipeout. Even the willingness of Paulson and others to allow Lehman Brothers to go under was based on the knowledge that the Fed and the Securities and Exchange Commission stood ready to mitigate any collateral damage.

In essence, risk has been transferred from the shareholders and creditors of the banks to the taxpayers. That risk has, in the jargon of Wall Street and the academic community, been socialized. This might not trouble left-leaning politicians, who often see government restrictions as an acceptable substitute for individual responsibility; but it is remarkable that policymakers on the right, who once fought it bitterly, are not only accepting, but actually abetting, this shift. The New Capitalism is not defined by ideology—witness Paulson working with liberal Democrat Barney Frank to develop massive new government interventions in and regulations of the mortgage markets. Instead, we seem to be approaching a new consensus.

Of course, if economic players know that the government—read, taxpayers—will bear losses resulting from their risky behavior, they will be tempted to take chances they would otherwise avoid. Run into trouble because you have lent imprudently, and you can take the bad IOUs to the Fed; issue highly leveraged instruments that impair your balance sheet, and the government will pay off some of your debt or even pump capital into your enterprise. The effect of the government's unwillingness to tolerate threats to the financial system is to socialize losses while allowing profits to remain private, possibly spurring even more reckless behavior.

To offset this moral hazard, former opponents of government intervention are now introducing a new, more pervasive regulatory structure to control market forces. Swarms of Federal Reserve System officials are descending on what had been largely unregulated investment banks to ensure that the availability of bailouts does not prompt them to take on too much risk or too much debt. The SEC is declaring certain securities off-limits to short sellers, and state regulators are arranging the mergers of insurance companies lest coverage for certain financial risks become unavailable. There's more, but you get the idea. Under the New Capitalist regime, Wall Street is a subsidiary of Pennsylvania Avenue and Capitol Hill.

The New Capitalism has affected not only our tolerance for risk, but also our sense of the appropriate role of social justice in the free market. Never mind that free trade increases total economic welfare, and has raised more people out of poverty more quickly than at any time in recorded history. More than one billion relatively low-paid workers have entered the international labor market in the past decade, in a process that has come to be called globalization. These workers, whose wages and living standards have only begun to inch up from subsistence levels, compete directly with low-skilled workers from the United States and other developed countries. This new competition depresses wages in advanced economies, and threatens the jobs of workers who have done nothing wrong except to be in the wrong line of work at the wrong moment in economic history.

Meanwhile, the very same globalization that is sapping the real incomes of some workers is lifting the earnings of many in the managerial class, as the premium paid for their skills and education grows. A Goldman Sachs deal-maker can make millions arranging mergers among his American clients; he can make hundreds of millions arranging deals across national boundaries. A CEO of a local or national brewery can make a fine living supervising his regional or national distributors and brewmasters; a CEO of an international brewery can spread his talents over millions more in assets and thousands more employees, and demand to be compensated accordingly.

These forces alone could explain the emergence of a dissatisfied, hard-put-upon working class. But their dissatisfaction is exacerbated by reports that something is amiss in America's boardrooms. Few begrudge Warren Buffett his billions, earned by shrewd investing, or Bill Gates his billions, earned by creating a great company that has changed the way the world works, shops, and plays. But, when CEOs wreck their companies and nevertheless stroll into the sunset and onto golf courses with hundreds of millions in bonuses, the Old Capitalism cannot survive. The voters' sense of fairness is offended so greatly that a significant government effort to redistribute wealth seems justified.

That effort, now underway, is taking three forms: a reappraisal of the efficacy of free trade; a radical revision—some dare call it "reform"—of the tax structure; and direct regulation of the lowest and the highest incomes.

The New Capitalism rejects the notion that free trade is an unambiguously good thing. Whatever else free trade has done, it has not shared its benefits in socially acceptable ways. Adam Smith teaches us the virtues of the international division of labor that free trade makes possible: "If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry, employed in a way in which we have some advantage." But, if free trade maximizes economic efficiency, it also creates losers as well as winners. In addition to the aforementioned executives, the winners are consumers, as any stroll down the aisles of Wal-Mart will make clear. The losers are producers that cannot compete with overseas suppliers and the workers they employ.

Of course, America has always been characterized by massive job destruction and even more massive job creation, as resources move from where they are no longer needed (or are less needed) to where they are most needed: That is what keeps an economy growing. But, if that is more or less where the Old Capitalism left the matter, the New Capitalism is groping for policies to transfer some of the winners' gains to the losers (John McCain's federally funded retraining programs), or to limit the competition faced by, and the pain inflicted on, losers by instituting de facto protectionist measures (Barack Obama's insistence on labor standards that would increase the costs of our trading partners). Call those measures what you will—reductions in the gains brought by trade, or a necessary offset to the imperfections of the interna-

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tional trading regime, or a moral obligation that winners have to losers—they are one way the New Capitalism rejects the distributional results of the Old.

And only one way it has set about redistributing incomes to offset perceived inequities. Henceforth, government will undertake previously unheard-of intrusions into the paneled boardrooms of corporate America, controlling the methods by which executive salaries are set. Board members, especially those serving on compensation committees, should no longer be friends of, or dependent on the good will of, the executives whose salaries they determine: They must be independent. And independent as judged by regulators. Auditors cannot build lifelong, cozy relationships with the executives and directors whose bookkeeping they are charged with reviewing; they must make way for other independent auditors after a number of years. Executive compensation must be transparent and somehow related to performance. In the case of investment banks and insurance companies that now benefit from being able to trot over to the Fed and trade in the dicey IOUs and mortgages they have on their balance sheets for hard cash, regulators are able to insist that the banks operate prudently, which gives them a say in setting executive compensation. And, horror of horrors: Executives now must attest to the accuracy of the financial statements on which they ask the public to judge their performance.

There is a risk in all of this, of course. As the great F.A. Hayek wrote, "It is questionable whether a society which will recognize no reward other than what appears to its majority as an appropriate income, and which does not regard the acquisition of a fortune in a relatively short time as a legitimate form of remuneration for certain kinds of activities, can in the long run preserve a system of private enterprise." But it can preserve a modified private enterprise system, a New Capitalism that accepts the legitimacy of such incomes because it is satisfied that those incomes are reasonable and fair. "Unfair" may be difficult to define, but, as Justice Potter Stewart said of pornography, we know it when we see it. The New Capitalism is not rejecting high incomes; it is merely demanding that they bear a reasonable relationship to the value produced by their recipients—which is what should happen in a properly functioning economy anyway.

The New Capitalism is not only attempting to regulate incomes so that incompetent executives do not benefit from golden goodbyes when the government has to bail out the firms they have damaged. More importantly, it is elevating equity to a role co-equal with, or perhaps superior to, efficiency as a guide to policy. It might maximize efficiency for government to minimize its interference in economic affairs, which is the position of defenders of the Old Capitalism (proponents of deregulation and low taxes on high earners); and efficiency, in the form of rising productivity, is the driving force behind increasing material well-being. But man does not live by efficiency alone, at least not New Capitalist man. There is something offensive about the multimillion-dollar birthday parties that some hedge fund operators favor in an era in which middle-income families are struggling.

No matter. For whatever reason—good or bad—we are about to see equity given greater weight relative to efficiency as New Capitalists recast the tax structure erected in the last days of the Old Capitalism. Old Capitalists worry that if the marginal tax rate on the highest earners is raised from 35 to 40 percent, the wealthy will be less inclined to invest and take risks. New Capitalists, who would distribute those funds to the middle class, think it is worth sacrificing a small bit of efficiency to gain a great deal of fairness. This is the one area in which the Old Capitalists have not capitulated, and are mounting a last-ditch effort to preserve the Bush tax cuts. They will lose, whether to a President Obama or to a Democratic Congress that will drive an only apparently reluctant President McCain back to the position that he took when first confronted with the Bush cuts: They just don't seem fair.

None of this is to say that the New Capitalism will produce material results superior to the Old Capitalism, which has, after all, greatly improved living standards and reduced poverty. Or that its new regulations, new trade regime, new tax structure, or new emphasis on fairness will satisfy those who are driving and those who are acquiescing in these changes. I have my doubts on both scores: The New Capitalists have not entirely met the burden of proof that rests on those who would change a system that has done so much to improve the lot of those fortunate enough to live under it. But there can be no doubt that the world has changed. Capitalism as we knew it even until a few years ago is no more, and we who are saddened at some of the changes had better learn how to make the New Capitalism function as well as it can, rather than curse those who have capitulated to its demands. ◆

Irwin Stelzer is director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute.

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Free Traitors

Mainstream economists reconsider globalization.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Jagdish Bhagwati is a humble man. He will tell you so himself. Describing the effect of his book *In Defense of Globalization* during a speech at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) last fall, the Columbia economist politely refused credit for single-handedly dampening growing concerns about the fallout from free trade. Fears of trade are "low-key," he said. "I won't say it's because of my book. I have colleagues who would say that. . . . People believe I have a large claim to fame, so I don't have to do it myself."

But, for all his bluster, Bhagwati was in something of a defensive crouch. His talk was titled "Free Trade Policy Today: Why Is the United States in Retreat?" and, although he was tempted to pin the blame on idiots in the press—he called *New York Times* writer Louis Uchitelle a protectionist who "never saw a tariff [he] didn't like"—a wayward economics reporter or two could hardly explain the shift in public opinion. Although Washington's trade deal with Peru—largely modeled on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—managed to pass Congress in December 2007 on a bipartisan vote, many politicians have become increasingly vocal in their opposition to future deals. One need only look at the dustup that preceded the Ohio primary, in which senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama competed to out-anti-NAFTA each other, despite the fact that it was Clinton's husband who pushed NAFTA through a resistant Congress 15 years ago. Nor are concerns about the effects of trade agreements limited to Democrats campaigning in the hard-hit manufacturing belt. Poll after poll shows that a majority of Americans, skeptical of their benefits, oppose NAFTA-style deals. A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC survey last year found that about 60 percent *of Republicans* believed foreign trade has been bad for the United States, up from 31 percent nine years ago.

The public's increasing wariness of trade agreements is easy enough to integrate into the narrative of eternal besiegement that free trade's advocates tend to construct. (Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was born, more or less, as an argument against the prevailing protectionist consensus of the day.) But what truly irritated Bhagwati was the perception that economists were rethinking the fundamentals of their pro-trade arguments. Two high-profile "defections" in particular merited Bhagwati's ire. In 2004, the father of modern trade theory, Nobel laureate Paul Samuelson, published a paper which argued that, as China developed economically—from manufacturing children's toys to, say, programming software—the net effect on the U.S. economy could be negative. Then, last year, Princeton economist (and former Federal Reserve governor and adviser to President Clinton) Alan Blinder circulated a working paper that calculated the number of U.S. jobs that could be shipped overseas. The number was headline-grabbing: 40 million.

Despite Bhagwati's assurances that these were minor blips misinterpreted by a man-bites-dog-hungry press, nearly all of the dozen or so economists I've spoken to have said that the academic conversation about trade *has* moved significantly. Fifteen years after NAFTA and ten years after the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, economists can now look at the actual results from a host of multilateral free-trade agreements. The results do little to overthrow the basic *theoretical* argument about comparative advantage—economies do best when they specialize in producing the goods and services they can make most efficiently and trade for those goods outside their specialization—but they have led many economists to be far more skeptical of the *actual* "free trade" policies that have emerged from Washington over the last several decades. The evidence has forced academics to focus on the distribution of trade's negative effects, the role trade agreements play in rising inequality, and the failure of trade agreements to deliver the bounty of jobs their advocates predicted. The result is that, while they may still deride protectionism, laissez-faire economists who once sought to keep government from meddling in the market have begun to embrace an unlikely new partner: the welfare state.

Given how heated debates about trade have become on the political circuit, you might imagine that the academic landscape is similarly contested. But there's actually a surprising degree of consensus across ideological and methodological divides in the academy that the predictions of trade theory have been more or less borne out in the developed world: Trade agreements like NAFTA have produced concentrated pain (job losses in low-skilled industries) and diffuse gain (cheaper consumer goods), with the gains outweighing the losses. "I am actually a textbook purist on this, and I'm a lefty," says Josh Bivens, an economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute. "The idea that trade raises total real income isn't in dispute," Princeton economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote me in an e-mail. "But it definitely feeds inequality in rich countries, although the magnitude is in dispute."

It's this distributional component—the difference between the "winners" and the "losers" in a trade deal—that has begun to command far more attention in the United States. "It's not just workers in the importing sector that suffer the wage cut" when forced to compete with foreign workers, says Bivens. "It's everyone that looks like them. Landscapers don't get replaced by imports, but their wages are depressed by having to compete with laid-off apparel workers. . . . Those without a college degree are going to take a hit; those with college degrees are going to get gains."

Just how much the losers have lost is a matter of debate, but most economists agree that the wealth gained from free trade has been redistributed upward, toward the skilled, and that low-skilled workers have suffered the most. They also agree that, as a portion of the total U.S. economy, the overall net benefit of NAFTA and other free-trade deals is too small to find with even the most powerful econometric microscope. What you're left with is a small gain in the nation's net income and a

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strong, lasting depression of wages that hits exactly the kinds of unskilled workers who had already been falling further and further behind.

The question is, if this was more or less what economists expected, why doesn't it feel like what Americans were sold? Bill Clinton did not say that we needed to pass NAFTA so that every American could spend some $50 less per year on consumer goods. Rather, he said that NAFTA's passage would "consolidat[e] the victory of democracy and opportunity and freedom" and "recover the fortunes of the middle class." Richard Freeman, a labor economist at Harvard, says that he could have predicted the agreement's consequences, and that fellow economists who went along in selling NAFTA should have as well. "I don't have great feelings towards some of them. . . . It was really oversold." Even strong supporters of NAFTA and increased liberalization agree. "Certainly, it was oversold," says Dartmouth economist and trade expert Doug Irwin about NAFTA. "Clinton spoke about all the job creation, etc. Academic economists tended not to be those cheerleaders."

STILL, ACADEMIC economists expected the gains to be more diffuse than they have been, and that reality has led them to reappraise the need for a helping hand from the government. "In the standard free-trade argument, it is assumed that positive impact will trickle down," says Ha Joon Chang of Cambridge University. "If the U.S. signs NAFTA with Mexico, some textile workers will lose their jobs, but, because it will sell more computers, that will create more jobs in the computer sector that some textile workers might get and more importantly expands the income of the national economy. The trouble is that, while this trickle-down does happen, it is not perfect. This is why many countries have policy mechanisms to deal with it. The most important is the welfare state." Bhagwati and Chang generally agree on little, but, on this point, Bhagwati is nearly on the same page. "The anxiety must be addressed," he said at SAIS. "We have to think of the system in a holistic way. . . . Think of a trapeze artist: He's got to have a safety net."

Such rhetoric is a marked change from that of the ascendant neoliberal vanguard back in the 1990s. During that period, the most extreme advocates of free trade, free markets, and laissez-faire tended to wield globalization and international competition as the crowbar with which to dismantle the welfare state: Health care had to be scrapped as well as strong unions because developed countries were competing against low-wage workers around the globe. "Globalisation driven by technological and multilateral trends," one Italian economist observed, "weakens governments' power to enforce welfare state schemes."

The view expressed by Chang and others I talked to represents nothing less than a Copernican shift. Dani Rodrik, a professor of political economy at Harvard, says, "The conversation in the last ten years has really turned from saying, 'The effect of globalization on insecurity and inequality is rather minimal and therefore you need the least amount [of social safety net] that's politically required to get your trade agreements passed.' Now, it's: 'Globalization is probably contributing a lot more to these problems and therefore a healthy globalization requires a domestic agenda.' " Fred Bergsten, director of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, agrees, saying that the proper response to the anxieties about globalization "lies in changes in our domestic policy: universal portable health insurance, portable pensions, much better unemployment insurance. . . . We just have to do a better job of dealing with the downsides, and the costs, and the losers."

Some form of this argument has long been in economists' arsenal when giving a measured defense of free trade: Yes, there are winners and losers, but government can first liberalize trade and then use the net benefits to compensate the losers. It's never quite worked out this way. The program created for this purpose, Trade Adjustment Assistance, is limited in scope and funding and not particularly effective, to say the least. In 2007, at the American Economics Association conference, economist Ramya M. Vijaya gave a paper which stated that a sample of out-of-work manufacturing laborers who enrolled in job retraining through the program ended up, on average, in positions with a lower wage than those who skipped the retraining.

And, if free-trade advocates have given lip service to the idea of strengthening the welfare state in order to offset uncertainty and inequality, they've spent little political capital doing so. Which is why it is interesting to see that Lawrence Summers, who served as President Clinton's treasury secretary during the headiest days of free-trade enthusiasm, is now having some very public second thoughts. Writing in the *Financial Times*, he noted that "[e]ven as globalisation increases inequality and insecurity, it is constantly and often legitimately invoked as an argument against the viability of progressive taxation, support for labour unions, strong regulation and substantial production of public goods that mitigate its adverse impacts." But Summers argued that such an attitude was a political non-starter, particularly as globalization "encourages the development of stateless elites whose allegiance is to global economic success and their own prosperity rather than the interests of the nation where they are headquartered." In a subsequent column, he concluded that the "domestic component of a strategy to promote healthy globalisation must rely on strengthening efforts to reduce inequality and insecurity. The international component must focus on the interests of working people in all countries, in addition to the current emphasis on the priorities of global corporations."

Summers's actual policy prescriptions—greater international cooperation in tax and regulatory policy—may have been weak brew, but it's important to note the arrow of casualty in the discussion here. It's not that academic ferment has changed the tenor of the political discussion over trade; rather, it's been the other way around. "I think, even on the right, you hear it more and more," says Mark Thoma, an economist at the University of Oregon who runs the popular blog *Economist's View*. "There's a growing perception that the political will to keep markets open or open them further depends on solving some of these distributional issues, health care, all of these things. I don't think there's complete buy-in on the welfare state, but what's new is the idea that opening trade further is going to require us to deal with the problem of winners and losers, rather than just acknowledge it. It won't just solve itself, and it won't happen quickly and easily."

Which is why, for all the economists' carping about anti-trade demagoguery, and the brain-deadness of trade discussions on the campaign trail, the popular and political opposition toward trade policy has had salutary intellectual effects. That is, academics may have scoffed at the supposed naïveté and short-sightedness of free trade's critics; now, they're admitting that they had a point. ◆

Christopher Hayes is Washington editor of THE NATION *and a fellow at the New America Foundation.*

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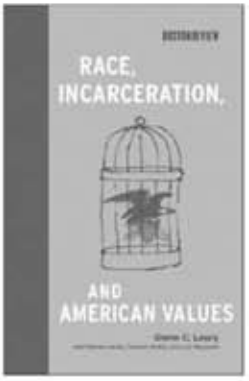

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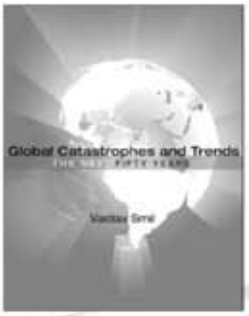

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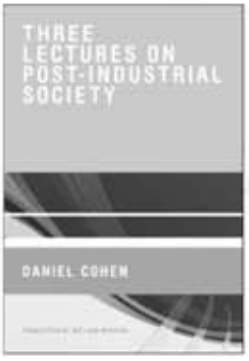

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Monsters' Ball

Global authoritarianism on the march.

JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

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In March of 2005, after color revolutions had swept across Central Asia and the Caucasus, Kyrgyzstan seemed on the verge of its own revolt. Crowds of protesters gathered in the streets of Bishkek, the capital, to demand free elections. Activists seized government buildings, and, as the movement gathered force, leading politicians joined the pro-democracy forces. Kyrgyzstan's press-savvy demonstrators called their movement the "Tulip Revolution," a knock-off of Georgia's "Rose Revolution," and, within weeks of the initial protests, the country's authoritarian leader, Askar Akayev, fled the country. Kyrgyzstan soon elected a new government, and, in the streets of Bishkek, protesters celebrated into the night.

Three years later, dreams of a Tulip Revolution have withered. The country's new leader, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, passed a constitution that vastly enhanced his powers, while cracking down on the once-vibrant Kyrgyz press and on religious freedom. Roughly one-tenth of the country's population has left, and jubilation has given way to despair. "Akayev made life miserable for us for fifteen years. But Bakiyev is twice as bad," one demonstrator told the *Financial Times* last year.

Kyrgzystan, though, is just one of many nations whose democratic prospects have faded. Just five years ago, democratization advocates were popping champagne. Across Africa, in the 1990s, elected governments replaced dictators in many nations. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, after the fall of the Soviet Union, new nations appeared ripe for change, and young democrats like Mikheil Saakashvili, who led Georgia's 2003 "Rose Revolution" and ascended to the presidency, pointed to a bright future. And, in East and South Asia, democracy spread across Thailand, Bangladesh, and Nepal. In March 2005, President Bush exulted in the progress he thought he saw: "Throughout the world, freedom is on the march."

Now, look again. After decades of advance, the worldwide march of democracy has come to an abrupt halt. Over the past three years, military coups forced out elected governments in Bangladesh and Fiji. In Nepal, democratic progress has disintegrated into political chaos. In Lebanon, the "Cedar Revolution" has collapsed into anarchy while glimmers of hope in crucial nations like Egypt have faded, with the Egyptian regime rounding up some of the country's most prominent dissidents over the past four years.

Meanwhile, many of Africa's most important nations, like Kenya, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have fallen back into authoritarian rule, rigged polls, and, in Kenya, possible civil war. And the touted "new generation" of African leaders in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Rwanda's have overseen brutal repression of dissidents and independent media. "Fifteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa registered reversals of significant magnitude," noted a recent report from the international monitoring group Freedom House.

Central Asia looks much the same. In Turkmenistan, the death of long-ruling, bizarre autocrat "Turkmenbashi" two years ago offered the chance for real reform. But, rather than holding a free election, the country's political elites replaced him with another palace insider, who has done nothing to open up the political system. Kazakhstan, once a democratic hope, has descended into political thuggery, with opposition leaders brutally murdered and power concentrated in a tiny circle around President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Even some long-established democracies like the Philippines and Thailand have faltered. A wave of political killings and other crackdowns led Freedom House to downgrade the Philippines from "Free" to "Partly Free" in 2006, while a military coup in 2006 toppled Thailand's elected government, leading to the shredding of its reformist constitution and, most recently, the declaration of a state of emergency. "I'm afraid to admit many things were better under [longtime former

continued on page 30

Anastasia Vasilakis

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Environmental visionaries came together at the Democratic National Convention to discuss the politics of green in America. Hosted by The New Republic, and generously sponsored by AREVA and GM, the two-day event offered real solutions to the climate crisis—and how to navigate the politics of the issue. Below are highlighted quotes from the event. To view the full panel discussion, visit TNR.com.

MATT BENNETT
There's no question that people are interested in more drilling and they have some mistaken ideas about what drilling may mean. A pretty large majority thought that drilling would mean lower gas prices within five years, which is not true. But on the other hand, what we found was people want more long-term thinking on this, at least until you start to inject the idea that they want to pay more for their energy.

SENATOR JEFF BINGAMAN
My thought is that it's to our advantage and to the country's advantage to broaden the debate. It's energy independence rather than oil independence. I think the truth is we can become energy independent more easily than we can become independent of all imports of foreign oil. And I think when you talk about energy independence, you open up the prospect of electrifying the transportation sector. You open up the prospect of developing biofuels as a domestic alternative to imported oil.

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MATT BENNETT
Vice President For Public Affairs
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SENATOR JEFF BINGAMAN
(D-NM)

REPRESENTATIVE ED MARKEY
(D-MA)

REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE MILLER
(D-CA)

CARL POPE
Executive Director
The Sierra Club

DAVID SANDALOW
Senior Fellow
Foreign Policy Studies
The Brookings Institute

CASS R. SUNSTEIN
Felix Frankfurter Chair
Harvard Law School

BRIAN KEANE
What we are in the process of doing … is a marketing campaign. We need to explain to the American people today that you can buy clean renewable energy. You can be energy efficient. You can live sustainably. And we need to do that through a marketing campaign that convinces them and proves to them that, in fact, when they do, life doesn't change as they know it. In fact, it is an opportunity. Life gets better.

REPRESENTATIVE ED MARKEY
What we have to do is just put in place the public policy that accelerates that pace, the way we did with telecommunications policy,

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so we get out of the laboratories and out into the field the stuff that's already there. Most of this doesn't have to be inventive … climate change turns into energy policy. It turns into jobs. It turns into those 3 to 5 million jobs.

REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE MILLER
I think the question is here, is the president willing and confident enough to direct the Congress and to ask the Congress to do those things that he thinks is important in putting this package together, and then being able to go to the American public to sell that.

SENATOR BEN NELSON
If we fix the energy economy and have an energy policy that is moving us way from the carbonized energy, dealing with the reality of climate change is going to be much more manageable, and it is going to create less of a problem for industry. And … I believe actually will result in not increasing significantly—maybe if at all—the cost of energy, which I think is what the American people would prefer.

TED NORDHAUS
Global warming is … essentially an energy modernization problem at a global scale.… The traditional sort of framework for dealing with pollution problems, which sort of have defined environmental policy for many decades (are) not going to work to address climate change.… We (are) going to have to rebuild the entire global energy economy from the ground up, and that (is) fundamentally a challenge—not a question of sort of limiting human intrusions upon the natural world, limiting human pollution of the natural world.

CARL POPE
Right now American energy consumers don't have very many choices. We say we have a free market but it's not very free in energy … Obama, could accumulate a huge amount of political capital by reforming energy markets first to give consumers choice … auction off permits—which is indeed what we should do—the demand for those permits would be low and the price would be affordable because consumers would easily be able to migrate from high-carbon solutions to low-carbon solutions.

DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS
Day Two

BRIAN F. KEANE
President
Smartpower

SENATOR BEN NELSON
(D-NE)

TED NORDHAUS
Author

CARL POPE
Executive Director
The Sierra Club

DAVID SANDALOW
What we are talking about here is a transformation of the global energy economy, and that doesn't happen in any one election cycle; it happens over the course of decades ... but we also need to be broadening the vision and making everyone understand that this is an issue of opportunity and this is an issue of wealth creation.

CASS R. SUNSTEIN
If you look at (Obama's) politics, he has an innovative auction system for allocating allowances. He wants to have a cap and trade program for climate change. So auction the rights, then trade them—free markets … Obama's bet is that if we have an auction system, plus a cap and trade system, we can unify people, both believers in free markets who like the trading, and believers in controls on greenhouse gas emissions, with the hope … that this program, because of the progressiveness, will spur innovation.

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dictator] Ferdinand Marcos," one activist told me last year.

In its latest report on global democracy, Freedom House glumly admitted, "2007 was marked by a notable setback for global freedom … a profoundly disturbing deterioration." For the second year in a row, the number of countries sliding backward in Freedom House's analysis was vastly greater than those making progress toward democracy. And many nations that had previously achieved the ranking of "Partly Free" in the organization's index have failed to progress toward democratic consolidation. At the same time, the most undemocratic states on earth, places like Burma and North Korea, made no progress toward reform last year.

Some of this is the fault of the Bush administration, whose halfhearted support for democracy around the world has given democratization a bad name. At the same time, new democracies have not figured out how to secure their new political systems beyond their first elections. And the corruption and instability resulting from these half-successes have undermined public confidence and given succor to new authoritarian leaders. After years of confidence, some advocates of democratization now are wondering: Has democracy reached its global limits?

As members of the Bush administration eye their legacies, they can be sure that their embrace of democratization has tarnished the very idea. In a 2006 report on the backlash against democracy, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, which funds democracy promotion around the world, admitted that some of its grantees overseas did not want to meet with NED program officers for fear of being tainted by association. The Iraq war, which was rationalized as an exercise in democratization, has also inspired new faith in authoritarian rule by linking the idea of democracy with the chaos in Baghdad. "What happened in Iraq makes the entire region afraid," Haitham Maleh, a former president of the Committee for Human Rights in Syria, told *Salon.com*. "People don't want to risk foreign occupation, chaos, and sectarian bloodshed."

Worse, the administration has not even stuck by its guns. After having earlier emboldened some Middle Eastern democrats with promises of a "freedom agenda," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, on her most recent trip to the region, barely mentioned the word "democracy." At times, the Bush administration has gone out of its way to assist autocrats, aiding the Ethiopian regime over the past three years in exchange for promises to help fight terrorism in Somalia and welcoming the leader of Azerbaijan at the White House after he rigged a national poll. The administration has even embraced leaders like Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who has been accused of abhorrent crimes, overseeing a regime under which political opponents are tortured, starved, and raped (Obiang himself has even been accused of eating the body parts of rivals). Still, in April 2006, Rice met Obiang at Foggy Bottom and—no doubt aware that Equatorial Guinea is becoming one of the largest oil exporters in West Africa—told him, "You are a good friend, and we welcome you."

Beyond the Bush administration's failings, the new democracies have failed on their own in many ways. The first generation of elected leaders in many developing nations seems not to have absorbed a critical lesson of liberalism: that it requires real opposition parties and civil society to thrive. Instead, these new leaders use elections as a mandate to crush opponents or to reward their own ethnic groups or close allies. Many Western nations have held up elections as proof of advancing democracy, but, as Larry Diamond, a noted democracy specialist, wrote in a recent *Foreign Affairs* essay, "For a country to be a democracy, it must have more than regular, multiparty elections under a civilian constitutional order."

In Thailand, former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was elected twice, in 2001 and 2005. After his first election, he co-opted nearly every other political party, crushed much of the independent press, and oversaw a so-called "war on drugs" in which thousands of people were shot and killed, including many who had no apparent links to narcotics. Thaksin openly defended his strategies: Democracy, he said, is not an end in itself, but merely a means—a means, clearly, to amassing personal power. In Kenya, meanwhile, President Mwai Kibaki, elected in 2002 on promises to clean up Kenyan politics, used his first term to reward his own ethnic group, the Kikuyu, a move that directly led to the ethnic strife that today is weakening a nation previously known for its stability.

The result of political systems in which the formal opposition is destroyed is more instability: People unhappy with their leaders, and seeing no established alternatives to turn to, take to the streets. This has happened in dictatorships throughout history; today, it is the nominally *democratic* leaders who wipe out the opposition and spark protest. In the Philippines, when Filipinos grew tired of current president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, they decamped to the streets of Manila, though so far without success. Kyrgyzstan's political opposition has camped out, too—seemingly permanently—in the streets of Bishkek, demanding the resignation of the president. In Bolivia, protesters frequently block roads, shutting off commerce and impeding economic growth; today, the country remains locked in an explosive standoff, with massive protests and violent clashes across the country. A recent poll by Latinobarometro, an organization that studies the region, revealed that, "In many countries, a significant percentage of voters (a regional average of 14 percent) believe that participation in protest movements is the most effective way to change things."

Newly elected regimes have done more to sabotage democracy than simply squelching the opposition. They have presided over rising corruption, growing crime rates, and weak growth. This social instability has led many publics to associate these problems with democratic government, even though they are actually often the result of broader changes like economic globalization. As a result, across the globe support for democracy is waning. In Latin America, the Latinobarometro poll showed a drop in support for democracy, with only around half of respondents "convinced democrats," according to the *Economist*. In an even more disturbing United Nations study in Peru, over 70 percent of respondents said that the country needed an authoritarian government. The Afrobarometer study shows similar trends. It found that younger Africans were less interested in voting, and less trustful of public institutions, than their elders. And, in Nigeria, it found that satisfaction with democracy after the two-term reign of President Olusegun Obasanjo—who was elected in 1999 on a mandate of reform but then tried to modify the constitution to entrench himself in office—was at a paltry 39 percent.

Hand in hand with the tarnishing of democracy, however, comes something more unusual: the revival of a newly effective authoritarianism. Over the past five years, authoritarian rulers have replaced old-fashioned tools of repression—electric shocks, brutal beatings, and arbitrary

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executions—with subtler and more sophisticated types of crackdowns. In Venezuela and Egypt, authoritarian governments have neutered foreign nongovernmental organizations and press outlets. Then they have backed domestic NGOs with idealistic names like Cairo's National Council for Human Rights and Bahrain's High Council for Women, while ensuring that these Potemkin organizations advocate little in the way of real reform. According to Middle East scholar Barry Rubin, Bahrain's High Council for Women actually tried to stop the creation of women's groups.

The new breed of dictators also cynically uses the structures of democracy to empower itself and bypass international scrutiny: In 2002 and 2006, Bahrain held an election for a "parliament" that has no real authority, while Egypt repeatedly has held votes in which major opposition candidates could not run, and tens of countries, from Zimbabwe to Azerbaijan, have held polls in which the entire electoral process was rigged from the start. "Many governments, including Bahrain, Jordan, Nigeria, Russia and Thailand, acted as if simply holding a vote is enough to prove a nation 'democratic,' and Washington, Brussels, and European capitals played along," said Human Rights Watch in its 2008 annual report.

This authoritarian revival, of course, is directly aided by old allies: China and Russia. In addition to their own domestic anti-reformist trends, both countries—threatened by the wave of color revolutions—have begun fighting back against reforms in other nations as well while cloaking this fight in the rhetoric of "promoting democracy" themselves. As Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment found, the Kremlin under Putin has established its own network of political consultants and election monitors, parallel to Western organizations, which Russia deploys in neighboring countries to help anti-democratic leaders keep their grip on power. The Kremlin also has allegedly helped the Tajikistan regime arrest a key opposition leader, tried to block European election monitors, launched an outpost of the psuedo-fascist group Nashi in Uzbekistan—and, most prominently, invaded Georgia. At the United Nations and other global bodies, Russia consistently opposes plans to sanction dictatorships.

Similarly, according to several Chinese writers, Beijing was terrified by the color revolution protests in Central Asia: In response, the Chinese government reportedly launched a "counter-revolution" plan. As part of its broader anti-democratic initiative, China now offers training programs for judges, police, and other law enforcement officials from Central Asia; in China, they can learn how to use the legal system to subtly prevent opposition in their home countries. And China and Russia have warily begun cooperating with one another, joining together at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a group comprising the two giants and several Central Asian states, to condemn democracy promotion in the region.

Perhaps most dangerous of all are China's and Russia's economic success—and the economic triumphs of other repressed nations. Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise Institute has shown that, in recent years, authoritarian nations have outperformed their freer peers' economic growth. Such trends have sparked the idea that a new model of economic development, a kind of authoritarian capitalism, can outperform capitalism combined with liberal democracy. In this authoritarian capitalism, the state allows some degree of economic openness in order to obtain foreign technology and investment, while keeping control over key sectors like oil and gas. This ensures that economic freedom does not translate into political reform, since the state carefully controls the pace of economic reform, preventing the kind of rapid opening that often sparks broader change.

The authoritarian capitalism model also tries to ensure that middle and upper classes, which have benefited from the economic opening, align their interests with the regime rather than with any democratic forces. In 2002, for instance, China's Communist Party threw open membership to entrepreneurs and other private businesspeople, who have joined in droves. The regime has instituted broad pay raises for academics, helping ensure that they don't lead protests as they did before the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations. Most importantly, the Party also constantly emphasizes that, if democracy were to arrive, it might upset the growth that has made Shanghainese and Beijingers rich. And, as in China, the Kremlin has co-opted the very people—middle-class businesspeople, students, academics—who, in other countries, have pushed for political change.

This strategy is successful both domestically and abroad: After two terms in office, Putin still enjoys approval ratings higher than 80 percent. According to Jonathan Unger, former co-editor of the *China Journal*, "Many of [the Chinese middle class's] members do not want democracy—that is, multiparty elections for the nation's top leaders." Meanwhile, the relative success of the Russian and Chinese model is appealing to other, smaller, proto-democratic regimes. Thousands of officials and technocrats from poor African, Latin American, and Asian nations attend Chinese training courses each year and return home awed by China's growth and convinced that this authoritarian capitalism is the secret to its success. "You are an example of transformation," said Madagascar's President Marc Ravalomanana during a visit to Shanghai for a meeting of the African Development Bank. "We in Africa must learn from your success."

In Vietnam, senior officials have modeled the country's development program on China's, and Phan Van Khai, Vietnam's former prime minister, pushed his officials to go to China to study its reforms. Other nations as varied as Laos, Syria, and Cuba have begun implementing elements of the model as well. Mounzer Mously, a Baath Party member in Syria, told Knight Ridder, "Reform should be aimed at improving the party and allowing free market elements into a socialist state, like China."

Of course, in admiring Beijing and Moscow, many leaders do not consider the fact that the growth of Russia and China may be due not to authoritarianism but to unique circumstances that cannot be replicated in Angola or Iran or Laos. Still, it's a formula that will be hard to argue against. John McCain talks a lot about showing solidarity with nascent democracies, but he doesn't acknowledge the extent to which democracy has become a discredited idea—or that his steadfast backing of the Iraq conflict has undermined some of his other democratic support. Meanwhile, Barack Obama has pledged to vastly increase the kind of soft power needed to set an example worldwide but has offered few specifics about how to take on this monumental task.

The sad truth is that, aside from expressions of solidarity with fledgling democracies, there may be nothing in the U.S. political arsenal—and nothing in U.S. coffers—that will be powerful enough to counter either the successes of savvy authoritarian capitalism or the rollback of idealistic-but-weak democracy. "There's always been support here for the U.S., but for this U.S.?" Thai politician Kraisak Choonhaven tells me. "And people here go to China, and they see the cities, the factories. They see the future." ◆

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

The Deadly Threat of a Nuclear-Armed Iran

What can the world, what can the USA, what can Israel do about it?

Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has declared publicly – not once, but repeatedly – that Israel must be "wiped off the map." That effort, the destruction of Israel, seems to be the main goal of Iranian policy. When Iranian missiles are paraded through the streets of Tehran, the destination "to Jerusalem" is clearly stenciled on them.

What are the facts?

A death wish for Israel. Ahmadinejad and the ayatollah who is the "supreme leader" have publicly mused that one or two nuclear bombs would obliterate Israel, but that, though it would cause devastating damage and millions of casualties, Iran would survive Israel's retaliatory attack. Iran is a huge country, with about 60 million inhabitants, so they are probably correct. And who can doubt that those religious fanatics would not hesitate to allow the destruction of much of their country and to sacrifice a third or even one-half of their population in order to eliminate the hated Jewish state? When our country was entangled with the Soviet Union in the bitter 40-year long "cold war," with both sides having sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy the opponent's country and its people, things were kept in place by MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction. However "evil" the leaders of the Soviet Union (the "Evil Empire") may have been, there was one great consolation and assurance: They were not crazy. But the Iranians and other Muslims are crazies, as we understand the concept. Because they take instructions directly from Allah, who tells them to kill the Jews and other infidels, whatever the cost.

> "An attack on the Iranian nuclear installations would fall under the heading of "anticipatory self-defense," recognized and sanctioned by international law and by common sense."

Israel has no problem with Iran. They share no borders and have no territorial dispute. In fact, they face common Arab enemies and should be natural allies, as they indeed were under the Shah. Iran's death wish for Israel is based entirely on religious fanaticism. In contrast even to the intractable North Koreans, the determination of the Iranians is immutable. It cannot be changed by persuasion, by diplomacy, by sanctions or by threats.

Once Iran is in possession of nuclear weapons, it will not only be a deadly danger to Israel, but to all of the Middle East and to virtually all of Europe. The flow of oil from the Middle East, the lifeblood of the industrialized world, would be totally under its control and so would be the economies of all nations of the world, very much including the United States.

What is to be done? In 1981, then prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin, being aware of Iraq's nuclear ambitions and looming realization of those ambitions, decided that its nuclear reactor at Osiraq had to be destroyed. The IAF (Israeli Air Force) accomplished that in a daring and unprecedented raid. Iraq's nuclear capability was eliminated in one stroke, never to rise up again. Israel had done the world an enormous service. Had it not been for Israel's decisive action, the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait and, without question, also of Saudi Arabia and its enormous oil fields, and, for that matter, of Iran, could not have been prevented. Saddam Hussein would have been the ruler of the world.

The solution to the deadly threat that Iran poses to the world is obvious. Of course, diplomacy and persuasion, threats and promises, sticks and carrots – every possible means short of military action – should be used until it becomes clear even to the most obdurate that nothing can deviate Iran from its chosen path of becoming a nuclear power and to dominate the Middle East.

There is reason to believe that the people of Iran, especially the young people, oppose the oppressive and theocratic regime of their country and are hostile to the mullahs who control everything. But the government has the tools of power firmly in its hands. It controls the instruments of coercion – it can kill people and it controls the oil money. While it would be most desirable and in the interest of the world to be able to foment an overthrow of the Iranian regime, that is an unrealistic and unattainable prospect.

Regrettably, there is only one solution to the terrible dilemma confronting the world, the unacceptable danger of a nuclear-armed Iran. The terror, the destruction and the 60 million dead of World War II could have been prevented at several times during the Nazi regime. But the Allied powers, under the leadership of Britain's prime minister Neville Chamberlain, opted for appeasement and for "peace in our time." We cannot afford to make that same mistake again. The world must give Iran an ultimatum: Desist immediately from the development of nuclear weapons; if you do not, we shall destroy the facilities that produce them. There still is a window of opportunity to do that. That window may close very soon. But who would do the job? The United States would be the obvious choice. But if the United States were in accord, Israel could do it, just as it did the job in 1981 in destroying Iraq's nuclear potential once and for all.

An attack on the Iranian nuclear installations would fall under the heading of "anticipatory self-defense," recognized and sanctioned by international law and by common sense. Nobody really knows for sure how far Iran is from reaching its goal — six months. six years? The experts disagree. But if Iran is not stopped now, it may well be too late not very long from now.

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

MATTERS OF BELIEF

Two young American women, Vicky and Cristina, go to spend a summer in Barcelona. Dining one night in a restaurant, they see a good-looking man across the room. Soon the man, a Spanish painter fluent in English, comes over to their table, says that he is about to fly to Oviedo to look at a favorite sculpture there, and invites them to come with him. To their own surprise, they accept. He pilots his plane through a storm, lodges them in a splendid hotel, whirls them the next day to the sculpture and the sights of the city, and pursues Cristina amorously, but when she becomes indisposed, he transfers his attentions to Vicky. She says she likes guitar music: he knows a wonderful guitarist and takes her to hear him. Then they visit his father, a charming old poet....

All this, we might easily think, sketches the first installment of a women's-magazine serial from the 1940s. But it is the start of Woody Allen's new film, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Allen has merely added to this old-type fantasy a great deal of frankness and sex. For instance, when the painter, Juan Antonio, approaches the women in the restaurant, he proposes that in Oviedo, besides enjoying food and wine and art, they make love. In the course of the story, the sex happens with all three. But frank though the film is, it never entirely masks the basic romantic fabrication.

The storybook quality is fixed at the start by the voice-over (not Allen's voice). As the two young women ride in a taxi from the airport, the voice-over describes their characters, as one kind of writer might do before he puts his people in motion. Throughout the picture, though the voice-over serves its usual purpose by helping with transitions, it never quite loses its authorial tone.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Most of the story is set in Barcelona, with the inevitable bow to Gaudí. The horizontal doings of the two women and Juan Antonio are the center, but the most electric scenes are between Juan Antonio and his ex-wife, a painter named Maria Elena. These two are divorced in name only. They still love each other fiercely—in two senses. When, further along in the sexual merry-go-round, Cristina is actually living with Juan Antonio, he brings his ex-wife home one night after she has attempted suicide—possibly to draw his attention. So, for a time, Maria Elena is banished to the guest room while her beloved is in the bedroom with his new girlfriend. Of course Maria Elena soon reasserts her sexual prowess with Juan Antonio: later she beds his girlfriend and, not much later, both of them. Thus the magazine romance is updated.

Allen strains to complicate the plot. Vicky is engaged—to Doug, a New Yorker she will marry in the fall. While she is vibrating with Juan Antonio's zing, Doug phones to say that he would like to have a pre-marriage in romantic Barcelona before their standard American wedding in the fall. So Doug's presence, maneuvered undeftly by Allen, is added to the tangle.

What keeps the film highly watchable, despite its structure, is the quality of its making. The cast could hardly be better. Rebecca Hall is intelligent, direct, calmly vivid as Vicky, who is a student writing a thesis on Catalan literature. Scarlett Johansson is Cristina, vocationally adrift, a mite pathetic. Allen suddenly endows her with a gift for photography, which sets her course. Johansson moves engagingly through it all.

Allen has dared to write Maria Elena as our old acquaintance, the tempestuous Latin woman, but the cliché is exploded by Penélope Cruz, who seemingly never heard of it and knows only Maria Elena. If fireworks could be sexy, they would depict Cruz. Lavishing credibility on the whole tale, or at least making us wish it were true, is Javier Bardem as Juan Antonio. He is a powerhouse. His tactful confidence with the two young women is winning, and his love-hate relationship with Maria Elena really steams. (One of their ex-marital quarrels takes place in a street, and Allen makes us believe that they are a neighborhood fixture—no passerby pays attention.)

VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA
Metro Goldwyn Mayer and the Weinstein Company

A SECRET
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Sparing us his own presence in the film, Allen inferably uses Bardem as his stand-in. Many of us have long endured Allen's lovemaking on screen; now, his age mercifully precluding his own sex antics, he has instead written Juan Antonio and fulfilled the role with Bardem. In a recent amusing piece in *The New York Times*, Allen wrote: "If this were a scant few years ago, I would have played Javier's part." This joke, like many a joke, seems rooted in secrets.

Well, he supports his fantasy with his true talents. Much of the dialogue is good Allen stuff—neat, perceptive, often funny. His ability with actors has been evident for years and has constantly grown. Likewise his fluency with the camera. From the opening pan of the picture through the compositions that emphasize and depict, Allen's directing is assured.

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But the film is considerably schizoid. All the gifts of the cast and of Allen, all the little insights that are scattered along the way, are expended on a screenplay that is mostly contrivances. The best deviation from dreamy plotting is the finish. A conventional romance would have had a knitted-up ending. *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* simply untangles. Its most up-to-date aspect is that it does not formally conclude. The American women have some warm experiences; then they travel on. The same is true for the viewer.

Many a film starts with the statement that it is based on facts, but this statement has never been more curious than with a French film called *A Secret*. The screenplay, by the director Claude Miller and Natalie Carter, is adapted from an avowedly autobiographical novel by Philippe Grimbert; thus we are entitled to believe that the crucial events are true. Oddly, this truth is bothersome.

A Secret begins in 1955 in Paris, in the home of the Grimbert family: mother and father and young François. The boy keeps imagining a phantom brother, which greatly disturbs his parents, Maxime and Tania, and the film sets out to explain why. There indeed was a brother—or half-brother—about whom François has not known.

The Grimbert family was originally Grinberg, French Jews proud of both parts of the term. In sequences of present-day revelation, as François grows older, he learns about the past, the coming of French fascism and German occupation in the 1940s, along with the Grinbergs' reluctance—typical of so many European Jews—to believe that their beloved native country could turn on them. In the 1930s Maxime is married not to Tania, but to another woman named Hannah, and they have a son called Simon. Tania is married to Maxime's brother, Robert. Nonetheless, Maxime and Tania are deeply attracted to each other.

This domestic imbroglio is set amid the continental upheavals of the time: indeed, the point of the film is to depict personal disturbances persisting in gigantically horrendous times. In 1940 France was divided into two zones, with the Germans in the north and the southern zone relatively free, and some of the family manage to get to the south. Then come the events in the film that make us pause. The political turmoil actually solves the family's domestic problems. Robert, drafted, dies of typhus in a camp, thus freeing Tania. Hannah, who knows about the heat between Maxime and his brother's wife, commits an act at the zone border involving her and her son that clears the way for Maxime.

Miller, a skilled veteran, reverses the old visual pattern for films with lengthy flashbacks: he shoots the past in color and the (evolving) present in black and white. This approach rightly makes the past the center of the film. The outstanding performances, fatefully passionate, come from Cécile de France as Tania and Patrick Bruel as Maxime. Still, the solution of marital troubles by external conditions, factual though it may be, tinges tragedy with the bizarre.

Postscript. Some readers were quick to spot a slip in my review of *Man on Wire* several weeks ago—a slip that leads to an interesting point about this endearing film. In this documentary about Philippe Petit, who walked a tightrope between the towers of the World Trade Center in 1974, I said there was only one reference to the destruction of those towers twenty-seven years later—one quick glimpse of the excavation of Ground Zero. Another viewing of the film proved, as readers had noted, that the excavation shot was of the building of the towers, not their demolition. I was in a way relieved. That (mistaken) glimpse of the disaster had seemed a bit of a token. When I saw that the picture made absolutely no reference to 9/11, it seemed even more whole. We can assume, I think, that Petit and the director, James Marsh, thought hard about how to deal with the disaster and felt that they had three options. One, they could give it a tip of the hat, which is what I had assumed and which would underscore (as I thought) that they had not treated it adequately. Two, they could treat it adequately, which would badly misshape the picture they wanted to make. Third, they could omit any mention at all of 9/11 and thus leave it to viewers, all too aware of the catastrophe, to supply the grim background for a film that is in a quite different key. The third option worked, to judge by most of the comments I have seen and heard. Critics and others have supplied the background as they watched. The exhilaration in *Man on Wire* is all the more a leap free of human limitations—at least for a time—because we know what is waiting there. ◆

Ruth Franklin
GOD IS IN THE HOUSE

HOME
By Marilynne Robinson
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 336 pp., $25)

With the decorous taboos that once governed literary life bursting like soap bubbles, contemporary American fiction has become a groaning board on which characters and plots often seem chosen less for their inherent interest than for their ability to shock. Terrorism, the Holocaust, the full spectrum of sexual practice conventional and unconventional—things that were once off-limits, suggested indirectly or through omission or addressed not at all, are now part of the literary free-for-all. There is only one character who is missing among the parade of pornographers, suicide bombers, child molesters, hermaphrodites, and other erstwhile outsiders who populate our novels. That character is God.

It was not always so, from Hawthorne to Sinclair Lewis; but by now the absence of God from our literature feels so normal, so self-evident, that one realizes with a shock how complete it is. It is hard to think of a recent American novel that treats religious experience seriously, unironically. Religious characters, when they exist at all, are repugnant fanatics—born-again Christians or West Bank settlers or Islamic terrorists. Think over the work of David Foster Wallace, Don DeLillo, Jeffrey Eugenides—does anyone ever go to church? (John Updike is an exception, but one would be hard put to call his vision of Protestant America an essentially spiritual one.) The primary function of Christmas, as in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*, is to provide an excuse for a family gathering. Even Philip Roth, who has done more than any other writer to characterize the state of Jewish America in the postwar era, has always understood religion secularly, as a set of psychological tics or cultural trappings to be shed like a dead skin. Is the apocalyptic trash of Tim LaHaye really what now suffices for religious fiction in America?

All this is to say that Marilynne Robinson stands virtually alone. Starting

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with *Housekeeping*—an uncanny little novel, published in 1981, that quietly established itself as a cult classic—Robinson has devoted her entire career to the investigation of spiritual life. Or I should say "spiritual living," because her books wrestle with the question of what it means to confront the world as a religious person, a person who is committed to the tenets of Christianity—which Robinson summed up, in an essay published a few years ago in *The American Scholar*, as "grace, generosity, and liberality"—while at the same time participating as fully as possible in daily human existence. "What I might call personal holiness," she remarks, "is in fact openness to the perception of the holy, in existence itself and above all in one another."

In *Housekeeping*, perhaps because Robinson did not dare directly to broach such an unfashionable subject in her first novel, such perceptions are largely kept beneath the surface, emerging in the symbols and the subtexts of this extraordinarily rich work about two abandoned children under the care of a loving but deeply unconventional aunt. Twenty-three years went by before her second novel appeared. Then came *Gilead*, the life story of a Congregationalist preacher named John Ames, told in a diary-style letter composed over a period of weeks and intended for his young son to read as an adult. At the start of the book, Ames, who became a father late in life—he is seventy-six years old—has been recently diagnosed with angina pectoris, and reports that "a flutter of my pulse makes me think of final things." As Ames reminisces about his father and grandfather and contemplates the path his life took, the novel's true story gradually emerges from his meandering thoughts: the transgressions of Jack Boughton, the son of his closest friend, and Ames's inability to forgive them.

In a profile in *The New York Times Magazine*, Robinson remarked that she had been trying to write a different novel, "a darkly comedic story of a woman 'abraded' by her experience of the world." One day she tried writing a poem in the voice of the elderly preacher who was a minor character in the book, and out of this *Gilead* rapidly emerged. Now, four years later—the blink of an eye, in Robinsonian time—we have *Home*, which must be some form of that previous novel. We are still in the small town of Gilead, Iowa, but the story's center of gravity has shifted from Ames's house to the Boughton homestead, to which Glory, the youngest daughter, has returned to care for her dying father. But the Jack Boughton whom we see here—mostly through Glory's eyes, since the novel is told almost entirely from her perspective—bears little resemblance to the shiftless, unsavory delinquent of Ames's narration. Instead we come to understand him as his sister does: as a physically and emotionally wrecked man who is trying desperately to remain sober as he copes with a devastating loss.

The specifics of that loss will be familiar to readers of *Gilead*, since Jack's confession of his deeds to Ames, and the preacher's forgiveness and blessing of him, form that novel's conclusion. It is natural, and in some ways even essential, to treat these two novels as a pair, since they revolve around the same family story and even include some of the same scenes. But they are not exactly mirror images. Episodes are repeated, but with details or dialogue subtly altered, as if to emphasize that though the books may complement each other, each is its own distinct fictional universe.

Glory will not learn Jack's full story until the novel's emotional last pages. Such withholding may at first seem coy, but it is intrinsic to the workings of Robinson's fiction, in which restraint, both literary and psychological, seems to be a virtue equal to faith, hope, and charity. ("Her family was slower to forgive

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a failure of discretion than they were to forgive most things actually prohibited in Scripture," Glory muses at one point.) Though Jack and Glory yearn for intimacy, neither is ever able fully to unburden themselves to the other. The catharsis, when it arrives, must come from outside. The novel's main drama consists in waiting: for the mail to come, for their father to die, for something finally to be revealed. Though there is a certain tedium in all this waiting, it is a sign of the novel's quiet power—yet also of the novel's quiet failure—that it can also feel sometimes like an experience, in Robinson's phrase, of personal holiness.

The first time we hear Glory's voice, she is praying. She is thirty-seven years old, she has suffered through a long engagement with a man who turned out to be a fraud (in the process losing her job as a schoolteacher), and now she is back home. "Dear God, she thought, dear God in heaven. So began and ended all her prayers these days, which were really cries of amazement. How could her father be so frail? And how could he be so recklessly intent on satisfying his notions of gentlemanliness, hanging his cane on the railing of the stairs so he could, dear God, carry her bag up to her room?" Three "dear Gods" in nearly as many sentences, each of them heartfelt. As we become further immersed in the workings of the Boughton household, there can be no doubt that we are in a world where religion is brought to bear on every aspect of life. The girls of the family are named Grace, Hope, and Glory. Of the oak tree in the garden, Glory reports: "Their father said if they could see as God can, in geological time, they would see it leap out of the ground and turn in the sun and spread its arms and bask in the joys of being an oak tree in Iowa."

Yet how little comfort their religion offers them! In *Housekeeping*, Robinson offered a vision of spiritual life on behalf of the girls' grandmother, who, "though she never spoke of it, and no doubt seldom thought of it . . . was a religious woman": "She conceived of life as a road down which one traveled, an easy enough road through a broad country, and . . . one's destination was there from the very beginning, a measured distance away, standing in the ordinary light like some plain house where one went in and was greeted by respectable people and was shown to a room where everything one had ever lost or put aside was gathered together, waiting." If only it were so easy. Glory and her father trust in their God, but their paths have not been straight or self-evident. Both are still suffering over the episode from Jack's young adulthood that led to his desertion of the family. At the age of twenty-one, he fathered a child with a girl from a poverty-stricken household on the wrong side of town; her age is never given, but she seems to have been barely a teenager. Jack would have nothing to do with the girl or their child. His family visited often and offered money for the baby's care, but their efforts were rudely rebuffed. At age three, the child died of an infection, and Glory has not entirely gotten over her loss: "It embarrassed her to remember how happy she had been, those three bitter, urgent years until it all ended."

Jack's sin, and the question of whether a person can ever repent fully, is the focus of *Gilead*. (Ames's very personal and initially very stern judgment of him is never entirely explained, except by the fact that the preacher lost his own first wife and child at an early age, which does not quite feel sufficient.) But in *Home* the question becomes how a person can live in the present knowing that past sins are irrevocable. And there are no simple answers in what the novel at one point calls "difficult, ordinary life." Intimacy, even between a brother and a sister, is not automatic; it must be earned through daily activities such as brewing a pot of coffee in the preferred way, or sitting up at night talking until the bars close and temptation is removed, or cooking a meal of chicken and dumplings after the darkest night of the soul. In *Housekeeping*, everyday chores such as hanging sheets to dry amount to "performing the rituals of the ordinary as an act of faith." In these novels, human relationships are by definition impermanent: marriages end or never happen in the first place, people die unexpectedly or commit suicide. The "intimacy of the ordinary," as Glory thinks of it at one point, achieved through perseverance and repetition, is all that can hold them together.

These intimacies, of course, all center around the home. If the novel's bland title never feels as perfectly suited to it as the brilliant choice of *Housekeeping*, the idea of coming home is nonetheless the current that drives its steady flow. One need not be a biblical scholar to notice the similarity of Jack Boughton's story to the parable of the prodigal son, that great tale of homecoming from the New Testament, in which a young man squanders his fortune on "riotous living" and returns to his father to repent, and his father receives him warmly, saying, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." (Like the elder son in the parable, Glory is jealous of the childlike eagerness with which her father welcomes Jack, and his fawning attention to his son's needs.)

The ideal of the perfect homecoming finds something of a realization in one particularly lovely scene:

> [Jack] came into the kitchen with cucumbers from the garden. His shirt bloused and his pants gathered a little under his belt, but [Glory] was pleased all in all with the way he looked and she could tell he was, too. He managed to seem a little dapper, somehow, a thing his pride required. She knew this was a relief to him. He washed the cucumbers. "Cucumbers smell like evening," he said. "Like chill. Need any help?" When she said no he went to the piano and sat down and began to play "Softly and Tenderly," a favorite hymn of his father's. He played it softly, and, she thought, very tenderly. She went into the hallway to listen, and he glanced up at her sidelong, as if there were an understanding between them, but he played on pensively, without a hint of detachment or calculation. "Come home, come home, ye who are weary, come home."

But the words of the hymn are not exactly transferable to real life. The weary can find some respite at home, but their troubles will follow them there. And if home, as the old quip goes, is the place where they have to let you in, a real homecoming is simultaneously necessary and impossible. "What kinder place could there be on earth, and why did it seem to them all like exile?" Glory wonders. In a treacly yet beautifully expressed epiphany, she realizes that "the soul finds its own home if it ever has a home at all." But it is a fundamental human drive to anchor a spiritual home with a home on earth, be it as permanent as a hundred-year-old house or as makeshift as the tent that Jack constructs out of a tarp and a clothesline in the attic, creating a facsimile of shelter that brings tears to Glory's eyes when she discovers it, so plain is its longing: "There was a floor of newspapers, a rumpled blanket and a pillow. He had set a wooden box on its side as a table and shelf. A flashlight, a few books, a mayonnaise jar with a handful of her oatmeal cookies in it. . . . It seemed almost domestic, and yet there was a potency of loneliness about it like a dark spirit lurking in

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it, a soul that had improvised this crude tabernacle to stand in the place of other shelter, flesh."

Robinson's reverence for the ordinary—and what can be more ordinary, by definition, than the place one comes home to?—finds its deepest embodiment in the language of her novels. *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, and *Home* are all written in a plainspoken style that can veer from unbearably stiff to unexpectedly sublime. When Robinson is at her best, no contemporary writer equals her in the perfection and the economy of her style. Her language is often elegant, but never elevated; its slightly old-fashioned quality—each of these novels takes place during the 1950s—is exactly calibrated. She has a gift for plucking a forgotten word out of the depths of linguistic memory, as when, in *Home*, a character talks "with the intermitted constancy of a pot simmering"—and "intermitted," though it gives a moment's pause, really is the right word, rather than the more common "intermittent." In *Housekeeping*, the narrator's grandfather has done a nature painting in which trees on a mountain are painted at right angles: "Every tree bore bright fruit, and showy birds nested in the boughs, and every fruit and bird was plumb with the warp in the earth." Listen to the rhythm of that last line with its string of one-syllable words, eleven of them, at once simple and strange. In *Gilead*, by far the plainest of the three novels, men standing outside a garage are "strong with gasoline"—it could not be said more briefly.

Housekeeping and *Gilead*, each less than 250 pages long and with a very limited cast of characters, showcased this style in its best light without overwhelming it with too many demands (although the plainness of *Gilead* at times becomes pious and overbearing). But in *Home*, nearly one hundred pages longer than its predecessor and more ambitious in scope, there is a surprising slackness. The novel, though written in the third person, is told almost entirely from Glory's point of view, and she tends to punctuate her thoughts with frequent "Dear God"s or "Ah well"s, which do a certain amount to establish her character but can also feel insipid. At one point she goes up to the attic to seek out some of her father's old clothing for Jack to wear, and finds some shirts "in a cedar chest, laundered and ironed as if for some formal event, perhaps their interment. They had changed to a color milder than white, and there was about them, besides the smell of time and disuse, of starch and lavender and cedar, a hint of Old Spice that brought tears to her eyes." The first image, of the shirts prepared for burial, introduces a note of dry humor that is all too rare in Robinson's work, and "a color milder than white" is just as good; but the sentence then starts to unravel into cliché and finally sentimentality. Glory is herself a somewhat sentimental character, but her creator should not have indulged her so much.

Yet the greater problem afflicting both *Gilead* and *Home*—a direct result of Robinson's choice to tell the novels from such a stringent perspective—is that the failings of the narrators translate into failings of the narratives. Glory is limited, as a character and thus as a narrator, by her own reticence and fear and propriety. There is a point beyond which she simply will not go—not when questioning Jack about his past, which she could be no more reluctant to touch if it were an actual gaping wound (and indeed Jack is once referred to as "a wound in his father's heart, a terrible tenderness"); and not even when thinking privately about her own history, about which the most she will allow herself is "The truth was, she wished there had been more to her endless supposed engagement." (From the next sentence, "That there was not her fiancé's extremely scrupulous

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respect for her to, in retrospect, embitter her sense of the fraudulence of it all," I hesitantly conjecture that Glory is regretting a lack of sexual experience.) Robinson sometimes mistakes simplicity for lucidity, and mystery for depth.

And Jack is no more courageous when it comes to revealing his secrets. The first 250 or so pages of this novel are little more than a chronicle of the pair's elaborate duet of discretion. More than two-thirds of the way through, it is disheartening to see Jack still backing away when confronted with anything painful: "There was still courtesy, taken back to what was for him its essence, the dread and certainty of being unwelcome, a bother, out of place." One wants to scream: No! This is not courtesy, this is insanity! Somebody, please, say something!

FRUSTRATING THOUGH it may be, this decorum is essential to Robinson's philosophy of fiction. For the trouble is not just that Jack and Glory lack the ability to open their hearts, to explain themselves to each other. This lack, in Robinson's view, characterizes our species. Ames punctuates the musings of *Gilead* with the frequent sigh, "If only I had the words to tell you," or the lament that his words fall short. Words are our best tool for understanding one another, but like all human constructions they will always be imperfect, because only God possesses perfect understanding. Ironically, although Ames is eternally aware of his own deficiencies, it is he who offers the most eloquent summation of this vision:

> In every important way we are such secrets from each other, and I do believe that there is a separate language in each of us, also a separate aesthetics and a separate jurisprudence. Every single one of us is a little civilization built on the ruins of any number of preceding civilizations, but with our own variant notions of what is beautiful and what is acceptable—which, I hasten to add, we generally do not satisfy and by which we struggle to live. We take fortuitous resemblances among ourselves to be actual likeness, because those around us have also fallen heir to the same customs, trade in the same coin, acknowledge, more or less, the same notions of decency and sanity. But all that really just allows us to coexist with the inviolable, untraversable, and utterly vast spaces between us.

In this spiritually atomized context, Glory's resignation to Jack's "inaccessible strangeness" becomes more understandable. And in the context of Robinson's spiritual vision, it takes on an added level of meaning. As she wrote in her *American Scholar* credo, Robinson believes—in strict contrast to evangelicals and other "born-again" Christians, and also in contrast to the concept of predestination, against which she vigorously argues—that a person's fate is always up for doubt. We all err, and so nothing can ever be taken for granted—not Christian doctrine, certainly not our own salvation. "To object, to dispute, to counter text with text—all this is legitimate and necessary," she writes, and continues: "This acknowledgment of inescapable fallibility has been called the origin of scientific method, and in this form we know that doubt and self-doubt are allied with truth—and that truth as we know it remains forever partial and provisional."

Robinson's spirituality of the provisional, the contested, the indeterminate certainly has precedents in many religious traditions, but there is a literary precedent for it as well. I have in mind Keats's doctrine of negative capability, which he defined as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." This is the foundational doubt not of philosophy but of art. And if there is a religious satisfaction to be found in not knowing—it is the mystical satisfaction par excellence—there may also be an aesthetic pleasure: the pleasure of imagination, which entertains multiple possibilities and perspectives without being required to settle dogmatically on a single one. What Robinson seeks in religion can be sought also in literature. The ambiguity that she attributes to the inspiration of spiritual life she might just as well have attributed to the form of the novel itself—a deeply secular form, and one that perfected the wisdom of the partial perspective, and in which what we call omniscience is merely a method for describing the very limited understandings of other people, real and imagined.

There is a poignancy in all this decorum and restraint, and it pays off in the novel's stirring conclusion, which is the more deeply felt for all that it leaves unsaid. "Jack didn't trust me well enough to tell me much about anything that mattered to him," Glory says at the end. "It's always been that way. There's a lot I didn't tell him. Maybe that's just how we are." Well, maybe it is. But maybe it isn't. This lets the novel off a little too easy. We might recognize that a book's characters find one another unknowable, and find such unknowableness interesting as far as it goes for them, but we as readers will still want to know more than they do. It is up to us to supply their awareness, to know them better than they know themselves. This requires an imaginative leap—or a whole series of them—over the gaps; and *Home*, in its monastic adherence to the precept that less is more, sometimes does not give us enough to go on, and thereby seems to deny one of the premises of the novel, which is that fiction is also a form of knowledge. The leaps of the imagination should not be entirely leaps of faith.

The sin of Jack's past, his involvement with the under-age girl, remains utterly opaque: the novel offers no hints at all about his motivations, and so our imagination is powerless to attempt a picture of what might have brought the two together. Likewise with Glory's fiancé: how did they meet? What exactly was he doing all those years? And most importantly, why did she allow him to deceive her? We cannot even begin to guess. And so reading a novel by Robinson comes to feel uncomfortably close to an act of faith. Yet the reader's belief in the writer cannot be like the believer's belief in God. And the writer, I mean the writer who is responsible to her art and its audience, cannot be a *deus absconditus*. However subtly or enigmatically or obliquely, the writer must provide meaning, or the conditions for the construction of meaning. The novelist has often been said to play the role of God, the lordly puppetmaster who brings the stage to bright life with human drama; but the agnostic reader of Marilynne Robinson may find herself sitting alone, and unfairly, in the dark. ◆

On the Hills of Georgia

Night over Georgia; mist across the heights.
Loud flows the Argava River above.
Only my chained and prancing heart's distress
remains intense, a pain so filled with you—
totally you—that all its darkness lights.
How can I help, combustible anew,
but live in love, even a bitter love?—
being powerless to live in lovelessness.

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

Translated from the Russian by Peter Viereck

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Sherwin B. Nuland

SKIN DEEP

MAKING THE CUT:
HOW COSMETIC SURGERY IS TRANSFORMING OUR LIVES
By Anthony Elliott
(Reaktion Books, 155 pp., $19.95)

Lying on a couch in the office of one of the hairdressing salons that she owns in London, Sharyn Hughes perused the advertising brochure she had been sent by Makeover Getaways:

> Our Malaysian Makeover Package is a brilliant combination of surgery treatments, sunny beaches and shopping. Offering the latest technological facilities in an exceptionally clean hospital environment, and with guaranteed five star hotel accommodation for post-operative recovery and holiday, you will return home fully revitalized and looking wonderful.

Within minutes, she decided that this opportunity for what she called a "thorough overhaul" was precisely what she and her partner, Grant, had been seeking. They would join the 100,000 other men and women who became surgical tourists to Malaysia in 2006, up from 40,000 only three years earlier. For Sharyn's breast enlargement, liposuction, and cosmetic dentistry and Grant's liposuction and cosmetic dentistry, the total cost would be £9,000 (considerably less than the same surgery in London), with a tour of the country included. She phoned Grant about her discovery, and began making arrangements for both of them to fly off to Asia for their rejuvenation.

In his thought-provoking and disturbing new book, Anthony Elliott describes Asia as having become "the world's hotspot for surgical tourism, particularly Thailand, Singapore and India." Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Latin America, the Caribbean states, and parts of the Middle East have witnessed a similar phenomenon, as cosmetic surgery has become as globalized as any other industry—not only for patients, but also for the professional personnel who provide it. The demand for such services and the mobility of the providers has magnified in recent years, and by every indication it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the entire concept of periodically re-imagining oneself—more, re-designing oneself—has taken its place in the culture of Western societies.

Elliott is a professor of sociology, and he has trained his keen sociologist's eye on the astonishing phenomenon that cosmetic surgery has become. Using the methods of his field of study, he now presents us with this small and insightful book that is sure to alter the perspective of everyone who reads it. It is Elliott's contention that there are three cultural forces, acting together and separately, that create the conditions driving the urge for the periodic reinvention of the self. It is an urge that has gripped many members of our society and will affect increasing numbers of those influenced by Elliott's three forces—numbers that include just about everyone. Those forces are the cult of celebrity, consumerism, and the new economy characterized by globalization.

The influence of celebrity culture, Elliott points out, has exploded in the first years of the twenty-first century. In a volcanic process abetted by new technologies such as DVDs and satellite television, the private lives of show-business personalities and other rich and famous people have become available at any given moment for the scrutiny of anyone who cares to look. Documented by continuous global media of various sorts, the body parts of celebrities are closely watched as they are exchanged for the latest variation in physical form. Celebrities not only transform themselves in the glare of the limelight, but many of them are willing—enthusiastic, in fact—to describe the details of their various transformations to reporters, TV commentators, and fans. Such well-known figures as Cher, Pamela Anderson, and Demi Moore proudly, even defiantly embrace a culture of inauthenticity.

It is no wonder that their millions of admirers do not hesitate to think of cosmetic surgery as the norm, and the periodically re-created body as one to admire. Cosmetic surgeons relate the tales of patients who arrive in their private clinics with urgent requests such as "I want lips and cheekbones like Angelina's." And not only female celebrities are on the list of cosmetic exempla. Mickey Rourke, Robert Redford, and Sylvester Stallone are also among those about whom the gossip

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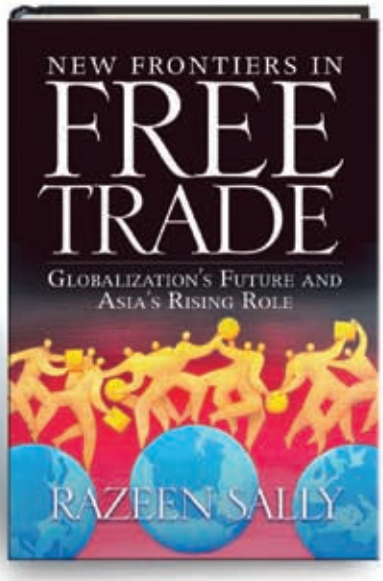

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mill has plenty to divulge. The "unprecedented levels of interest in the lives, loves, and scandals of celebrities, and particularly fascination with their secrets and surgeries, have been widely viewed as a central driving force of cosmetic surgical culture," Elliott tells us.

Many people now reject the notion that one should look older as one biologically ages. Inspired by the public example of the stars, ordinary men and women beat a path to the plastic surgeon's office in search of a youth that can be renewed at any stage of life. In a consumer society, a makeover of one's appearance is just another product to be bought when it is desired, and is not infrequently accompanied by a makeover of the self, to conform with the new image. Expectations run high, and, not unsurprisingly, they include the admiration of the opposite sex.

No longer is vanity or narcissism the major stimulus to cosmetic improvement. It is unlikely that Sharyn realized it, but in signing up for her Malaysian makeover she was acting in accordance with the principles of the consumer culture in which we now live. In this atmosphere, cosmetic surgery is a product to be sold by its vendors, and the current generation of purchasers treat it as something for which they shop, like a new refrigerator or cell phone. And like other products, their desire for it is influenced by two strategies employed by the consumer industry in such a way that the buyer always wants more. The first is to devalue the product soon after it has been bought, as when a more advanced form of mobile phone hits the market and makes the previous model obsolete. The second is to satisfy the consumer's desires in such a way that new desires are created.

The case of Sharyn is a perfect example of this pattern. Long a consumer of Botox injections and various forms of beauty creams, she came to believe that her ideal self could not be realized unless she took the more invasive measure of undergoing surgery. Elliott undertook a study of women's magazines and was struck by the hypnotic power of the advertisements for various surgical procedures. Women exposed to them can hardly be blamed if they come to believe that the standard of beauty is determined by the appearance of the body that has been altered by the scalpel. The subliminal message transmitted by the beauty industry is that people can re-invent themselves whenever they choose. Since surgical enhancements are not contrived to last, they fulfill the requirements for which they were designed.

> Increasingly, cosmetic surgeons dispatch their patients home with a brochure, catalogue or DVD—in which is outlined other cosmetic procedures by which one can keep one's surgically enhanced body up to scratch. In marketing terms, this involves deflecting attention from the particular procedure undergone and broadening the advertising coverage to encompass the barrage of procedures now offered by cosmetic surgical culture. In this way, the market for cosmetic surgery is maintained through selling its associations, linkages and possibilities.

Financial inducements are sometimes offered: a guaranteed price for signing up right now; a discount for bringing in a coupon clipped from a magazine; alter one body area and get one free. These concepts are all derived from the world of marketing, not medicine.

The third force that has contributed to the boom in cosmetic surgery is economic. Originally with the thought of obtaining a career edge, more than a few executive types have sought physical re-invention merely to keep up. "Globalization is a world of transformations," Elliott remarks, in which perpetual change—the continual renewal of self-actualization—is the key to success. Much of this is due to a workplace ambience in which career changes are far more common than they have been in the past, often requiring the acquisition of an entirely new set of skills. We have already reached the point where the average American graduating from college can expect to hold twelve different jobs in a lifetime and change his or her skill base at least three times. In such an atmosphere, job security becomes a thing of the past, as does employee loyalty. Everyone is a short-termer, increasingly concerned that his job will disappear or he will be displaced by a younger, more vibrant-appearing person.

This is a price we pay for the speed of intensive globalization. There is a dynamism to it that over-runs us, and in which we will be drowned if we do not take measures to keep current. Increasingly, such measures include the physical and emotional makeover. By these means, the culture of cosmetic surgery becomes an integral component of globalization. "In a world of short-term contracts, endless downsizings, just-in-time deliveries and multiple careers," Elliott observes, "the capacity to change and reinvent oneself has become fundamental."

Driven by the relentless energy of all these forces, then, cosmetic overhaul has become an indispensable aspect of the lifestyles of a substantial portion of certain elements of Western society. Celebrities are its vanguard; consumerism is its modus operandi; and globalism creates an economic urgency that makes its progress irresistible. All evidence points toward an ongoing increase in the influence of all three.

None of this could have occurred, of course, without the enthusiastic participation of the surgeons who deliver the product. Though Elliott does not discuss this aspect of his subject, it is difficult for anyone even remotely placed within the ranks of the medical profession to read his chapters without wincing—unless, of course, they are among the providers. At the very least, the surgery described in this book represents a misuse of resources. While they probably cannot, strictly speaking, be called unethical in the usual sense, these procedures and operations—and the hucksterism associated with them—seem rarely to qualify as unalloyed examples of the healer's art. Certainly, they were not what was intended by the pioneers of plastic surgery and their principled followers.

As for the medical ethicists, I must note that their literature is singularly free of commentary on cosmetic surgery or any of the uses to which it has been put. The literature of surgery itself contains many articles on the techniques being employed, but it has nothing to say about the context or the milieu in which they are offered to the public. The only textbook devoted completely to the ethics of surgery—*Surgical Ethics*, to which thirty-nine surgeons and ethicists contributed —is now ten years old, and there is no mention of the problem in any of its nineteen chapters. Neither does the four-page Code of Ethics of the American Board of Plastic Surgery, which is the governing body for the specialty, address the issue.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not saying that performing these operations is in itself unethical, merely that the reasons for this intervention in the body are cultural, not medical; and that the associated hustling has a low

ANTHONY RUSSO

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and unpleasant odor about it, which could do with more attention from the respective communities of surgeons and ethicists than it has yet received. Anything connected with the healer's art should be as far above suspicion as Caesar's wife.

Worst of all for its customers, the instability of that imperative of "making the cut" intrudes itself into daily life, seeping into self-image, and habits, and even identity, and makes all of these once-steadfast qualities now seem disposable. All of this brings with it a kind of fear and a sense of loss of what is real, not only on the part of those who go chasing after reinvention but also for everyone with whom they interact. Anthony Elliott ends his book with a warning that, in a single sentence, epitomizes its wise and disheartening message: "The wider social costs mean that we are all debased by this soulless surgical culture." ◆

Christopher Benfey
SING FOR ME, MUSE, THE MANIA

WORDS IN AIR:
THE COMPLETE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ELIZABETH BISHOP AND ROBERT LOWELL
Edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 845 pp., $40)

"Your poem came to the right buyer," Robert Lowell wrote to Elizabeth Bishop during the spring of 1976 after receiving "One Art," the nineteen lines that Bishop called "the one & only villanelle of my life." Composed in a tightly repetitive form inherited from the troubadours of the late Renaissance, "One Art" may be the best known, most anthologized American poem of the past half-century. Its opening lines—

> The art of losing isn't hard to master;
> so many things seem filled with the
> intent
> to be lost that their loss is no disaster—

are familiar to college students who couldn't tell you whether they were by Bishop, Shakespeare, or Robert Frost. Bishop's wry how-to manual, with its practical lessons in losing—"Lose something every day. Accept the fluster / of lost door keys, the hour badly spent"—was as right for the self-help 1970s as Dylan Thomas's equally famous villanelle, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," was for an age of self-styled existentialists braving what Lowell called the "tranquillized Fifties."

Three days after his fifty-ninth birthday, Lowell (known as Cal to his friends) accompanied his praise for "One Art" with the news that he had just completed "a longish though not violently troubled stay in the hospital" after yet another of the manic episodes that plagued his adulthood. "I fear the frequency of these things," he wrote. "Yet I put my trust in my doctor's unruffled trust in lithium." "I haven't been too well myself," Bishop countered. Six years older than Lowell, she was in recovery from an alcoholic binge brought on by her fear that her companion, Alice Methfessel, was about to leave her. The jaunty tone of "One Art" breaks down in its ending:

> —Even losing you (the joking voice,
> a gesture
> I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
> the art of losing's not too hard to
> master
> though it may look like (Write it!)
> like disaster.

"The last 4 lines are the triumph," Lowell remarked, "here the poet's voice rings out. I am reminded of Wyatt or Herbert. You command your words."

The exchange over "One Art" came toward the end of a remarkable friendship—part long-distance romance, part artistic collaboration, part AA meeting—that lasted almost thirty years. This huge and wonderful book encompasses all the surviving correspondence between Bishop and Lowell, 458 items in all, adding more than three hundred previously unpublished letters to those already available in Bishop's *One Art: Letters* (1994) and *The Letters of Robert Lowell* (2005). Thomas Travisano's boosterish introduction betrays some anxiety:

> In July 1965 the great mid-century American poet Robert Lowell (1917–1977), who had recently weathered a controversy that brought him into widely publicized opposition to the nation's president, wrote affectionately to his poetic peer and close friend Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) from his summer retreat in Castine, Maine, "How wonderful you are Dear, and how wonderful that you write me letters.... In this mid-summer moment I feel at peace, and that we both have more or less lived up to our so different natures and destinies. What a block of life has passed since we first met in New York and Washington!"

If Lowell's "great" poetry is not as popular as it once was, Travisano seems to imply, at least Lowell was a public figure whose opposition to "the nation's president" over the Vietnam War was "widely publicized."

It is true that Lowell's reputation has slipped since his death, and that Bishop's has steadily risen. His ferocious productivity (his *Collected Poems* is 850 pages long), compared with her spare perfectionism (180 pages of collected poems in the recently published Library of America edition), has made her the easier poet to appreciate. They seem at times a bipolar pair, his manic output matched by her depressive reticence. "I've always felt that I've written poetry more by *not* writing it than writing it," Bishop told Lowell. But what *Words in Air* makes clear is that their poetry developed in tandem: they borrowed and stole from each other, made revisions according to the other's advice, tested and discarded poems after consultation, and (perhaps most importantly) wrote to satisfy the towering expectations each poet had for the other. They remind one in many ways (and sometimes reminded themselves) of Coleridge and Wordsworth, though a closer analogy might be to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. One can easily imagine Lowell putting his unmade bed on the wall and calling it art.

Lowell and Bishop met in January 1947 at a dinner party in New York hosted by the poet Randall Jarrell, the cruelest critic of their generation. "I loved him at first sight," Bishop wrote of Lowell in an unpublished draft of a memoir appended to *Words in Air*. All three poets had just seen a popular

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Picasso exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery. "Lowell's taste & mine agreed well," Bishop wrote. "Jarrell tended to argue and make fun and at one point he demonstrated painting a picture with his feet, to show us what was coming next." Lowell was "rather untidy," she recalled. "He was wearing a rumpled dark blue suit; I remember the sad state of his shoes; he needed a hair cut, and he was very handsome and handsome in an almost old-fashioned poetic way." Lowell, who revised everything, offered his own version of their meeting in a letter in 1974: "I see you as rather tall, long brown-haired, shy but full of des[cription] and anecdote as now." To which Bishop replied: "Never, never was I 'tall.' I was always 5 ft 4 and ¼ inches—now shrunk to 5 ft 4 inches.... And I never had 'long brown hair' either!—It started turning gray when I was 23 or 24—and probably was already somewhat grizzled when I first met you."

Bishop and Lowell were both New Englanders, both financially comfortable, and educated at elite schools. Bishop was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her father, a building contractor, died when she was eight months old; her mother was committed to a mental hospital when Bishop was five. She recalled her mother's breakdown in a haunting story called "In the Village," in which she remembered her mother's final cry: "The scream hangs there like that, unheard, in memory—in the past, in the present, and those years between." Lowell turned the passage into his poem "The Scream." Farmed out to relatives on both sides of her family, Bishop attended boarding school and Vassar on a trust fund established by her father.

An only child like Bishop, Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV was born where Lowells are always born, in Boston. He once described his mother as "a scolding rusty hinge" who browbeat his mild and "mumbling" father into quitting his administrative job in the Navy and going into business selling soap. Lowell attended St. Mark's and, briefly, Harvard before continuing his education at Kenyon College, where he roomed with Jarrell in the house of their favorite teacher, the Southern poet-critic John Crowe Ransom. In 1946, the year before they met, Lowell and Bishop had published their first real books. Bishop's *North & South* included such lasting masterpieces as "The Man-Moth" and "The Fish," and won the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize Fellowship; Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*, a lesser if louder achievement in its declamatory rhymed verse, won the Pulitzer Prize.

Their growing intimacy seems to have surprised them both. Lowell's first marriage, to the writer Jean Stafford, was ending in divorce. Bishop was also ending a long-term relationship, with a woman from Key West named Marjorie Stevens. For the first two years of their friendship, at least in Lowell's mind, the possibility of marriage was in the air. In "Water," the first poem in *For the Union Dead* (later revised into a sonnet titled "Water 1948"), he reminded her of a particular afternoon in Stonington, Maine, when they swam and talked on a slab of rock:

> We wished our two souls
> might return like gulls
> to the rock. In the end,
> the water was too cold for us.

"When you write my epitaph," Bishop told him that day, "you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived." Lowell thought of proposing at the time, but got cold feet: "like a loon that needs sixty feet, I believe, to take off from the water, I wanted time and space." As he explained, in a letter of 1957:

> I do think free will is sewn into everything we do; you can't cross a street, light a cigarette, drop saccharine in your coffee without really doing it. Yet the possible alternatives that life allows us are very few, often there must be none. I've never thought there was any choice for me about writing poetry. No doubt if I used my head better, ordered my life better, worked harder etc., the poetry would be improved, and there must be many lost poems, innumerable accidents and ill-done actions. But asking you is *the* might have been for me, the one towering change, the other life that might have been had.

Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, Brazil, 1962

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Bishop's characteristically down-to-earth response to all this melodrama was basically: get a good shrink and don't drink.

Other choices were made, in any case. Lowell married the writer Elizabeth Hardwick in 1949; their child, Harriet, was born in 1957. Bishop forged an enduring relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, a Brazilian aristocrat and government official, at whose house she recovered from an allergic reaction on a trip to South America in 1951. They lived together in Brazil until Soares's suicide in 1967. Both poets continued lifelong struggles with mental illness and addiction, and the accompanying wreckage is well documented. There was a particularly nasty episode at Yaddo, the artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, early in 1949, amid an FBI probe regarding possible communist activity there. Grandiose and paranoid, Lowell led the prosecution, accusing the director of being a communist, before order was restored.

Lowell suffered his first major manic attack later that spring, and described it in an autobiographical draft:

> The night before I was locked up I ran about the streets of Bloomington Indiana crying out against devils and homosexuals. I believed I could stop cars and paralyze their forces by merely

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> standing in the middle of the highway with my arms outspread.... Bloomington stood for Joyce's hero and Christian regeneration. Indiana stood for the evil, unexorcised, aboriginal Indians. I suspected I was a reincarnation of the Holy Ghost, and had become homicidally hallucinated. To know the glory, violence, and banality of such an experience is corrupting.

On later occasions, Lowell channeled Hitler instead of Jesus. Bishop was hospitalized in 1949 as well, and she began a regimen of alcohol-aversion therapy in 1954.

Somehow, amid the glory and the banality, the poems got written. Tranquilized or not, the 1950s were an interesting time for American poets eager to make their mark. The intimidating monuments of modernism were there for all to see, even as their creators—Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Williams, Frost—endured the humiliations of old age, or worse. Lowell and Bishop, who both served as poetry consultants at the Library of Congress, visited Ezra Pound at the mental hospital of St. Elizabeths in Washington, where he was held for making treasonous radio broadcasts in support of Mussolini. In 1948, Lowell was one of the judges who voted, controversially, to award Pound the Bollingen Prize for his *Pisan Cantos*; Bishop wrote her strange and moving "Visits to St. Elizabeths," dated 1950, with its nightmarish nursery-rhyme phrasing: "This is the house of Bedlam. / This is the man / that lies in the house of Bedlam. / This is the time / of the tragic man / that lies in the house of Bedlam...."

Metaphors for madness come from pottery, with vulnerable vessels cracked and crazed in the kiln's inferno. The pathos of the locked psychiatric ward, where communal visiting hours were interrupted by outbursts from other inmates, seemed an all-too-real possible future for Lowell and Bishop—a special circle of Dante's Hell reserved for aging poets. Bishop never doubted that Pound was a crackpot. "*Why*," she wondered, "do some poets manage to get by and live to be malicious old bores like Frost or ... pompous old ones, like Yeats, or crazy old ones like Pound—and some just don't?"

Some of the most interesting pages in *Words in Air* are shoptalk: two smart and ambitious poets seeking to position their own work amid competing models. Another visitor to St. Elizabeths circa 1950 was Charles Olson, a Melville scholar trained at Harvard and a poet eager to put his own spin on lessons learned from Pound. Bishop called Olson one of the "three or four people in this world I really hate," but offered no further explanation. Olson's influential manifesto "Projective Verse" appeared in 1950, laying out an agenda for experimental poetry involving what he called "COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form." Black Mountain College in North Carolina, which Olson ran for several years in the early 1950s, became a kind of cultural think-tank for poets such as Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, bent on following Olson's lead, and for painters such as Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly. By the mid-1950s, there was some cross-fertilization between Black Mountain and the Beat writers of the West Coast.

Bishop and Lowell exchanged wary reactions to all this ferment, and kept a close eye also on the Beats. In 1959, Lowell reported that "Ginsberg, Corso, and Orlovsky came to call on me" in his New York apartment. "When they came in, they all took off their wet shoes and tiptoed upstairs. They are phony in [a] way because they have made a lot of publicity out of very little talent.... How can you make a go for long by reciting

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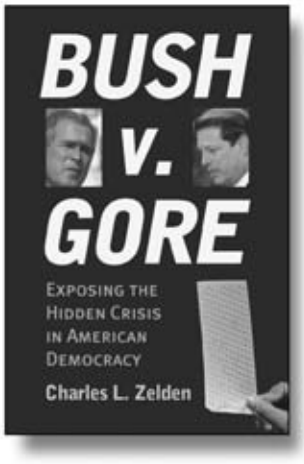

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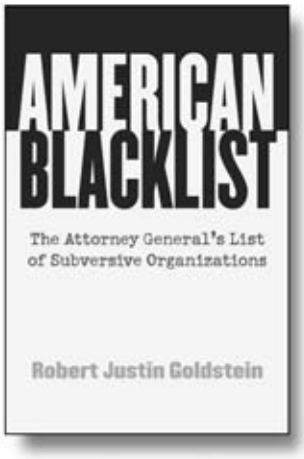

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so-so verse to half-jeering swarms of college students?" Bishop replied: "I have read some of the poetry and find it hopeless—and yet I sympathize with them." In a later letter, she explained her sympathy. She quoted Lowell's remark about Marianne Moore's "terrible, private, and strange revolutionary poetry," and his claim that "there isn't the motive to do that now." Bishop wondered why not:

> Isn't there even more—only it's terribly hard to find the exact and right and surprising enough, or unsurprising enough, point at which to revolt now? The Beats have just fallen back on an old corpse-strewn or monument-strewn battle-field—the real real protest I suspect is something quite different. (If only I could find it. Klee's picture called FEAR seems close to it, I think…)

Bishop is probably referring to *Mask of Fear* at the Museum of Modern Art, with its Humpty Dumpty–like figure, inspired by a Zuni sculpture, walking on four spindly legs. It is striking how often Bishop in her letters alludes to contemporary art as a provocation for her own work. She is curious about Abstract Expressionism, but she prefers what she calls the "strange kind of modesty" that she associates with "Klee and Kokoschka and Schwitters": "Modesty, care, *space*, a sort of helplessness but determination at the same time." Of course, she is also describing her own aesthetic instincts. Bishop loved Joseph Cornell's work; she constructed boxes like his and translated Octavio Paz's poem about him. Lowell preferred Old Masters such as Vermeer and Holbein. In 1957, when Rothko and de Kooning and Johns were on the scene, he announced confidently that the best painters in America were Ben Shahn, Morris Graves, and Hyman Bloom.

One feels this contrast of temperaments in the differing rhythms and styles of the letters themselves. Lowell accurately describes his own letters as "muscle-bound." In a picaresque narrative of a cruise aboard the poet Richard Eberhart's sailboat, Lowell works up the drunken crew, including a former wife of the Beat poet Kenneth Rexroth, who was for Lowell a bête noire:

> She had gone to six consecutive Eberhart readings (sometimes two a day)! In fact she was all too much astride the high, foamy wave of Eberhart's élan, and Betty [his wife] was rather balky and unpoetic about obeying Dick, still a bungalow man and not yet the skipper of the *Reve*.… [On shore] you felt you were seeing the great Roman villas described by Horace and Juvenal as examples of the glorious *sic transit gloria mundi* of the imperial Roman's middle age (His own middle age, not Rome's!). We landed at Somesville, went ashore, a rather ungracious little group … the ex-Mrs. Rexroth, figury, black sweatery, faded red haired, Dick, home-made Commander Whitehead, fringe-bearded, sunset red-faced, wearing a plum and beige lumber-jacket.

It is easy to imagine that passage chopped and squared into one of Lowell's sonnets. Lowell had a way, as Bishop noted, of "prefacing a name with adjective piled on adjective—I like this very much; sometimes I disagree with an adjective or two, but usually the others will be accurate, surprising, maybe, but suddenly new and absolutely right—you can take your choice."

Bishop worried that her own writing was "frivolous," and that her family connections could hardly match his.

> I feel that I could write in as much detail about my Uncle Artie, say—but what would be the significance? Nothing at all. He became a drunkard, fought with his wife, and spent most of his time fishing … and was ignorant as sin. It is sad; slightly more interesting than having an uncle practicing law in Schenectady maybe, but that's all. Whereas all you have to do is put down the names! And the fact that it seems significant, illustrative, American, etc., gives you, I think, the confidence you display about tackling any idea or theme, *seriously*, in both writing and conversation.

She admired his aristocratic hauteur, seemingly inherited from the august line of Lowells, which neither madness nor domestic squalor could break down, but she never sought to emulate it. She recognized the different strengths, the different art, to be derived from a shaky line of Uncle Arties, significant and illustrative of the helplessness twinned with determination she was after.

In these letters, Bishop's very frivolity is infectious. "I believe," she wrote, "in swimming, flying, and crawling, and burrowing." That exquisitely delayed "and burrowing" finds a descriptive equivalent in her account of a tiny clown at a circus in Rio, who "made an exit breaking wind in huge puffs of blue smoke, with reports like a cannon—again, and again, and finally just once more from behind the red velvet curtain." What she said of the "sketchiness" of Emily Dickinson's letters could be said of her own: "It is the sketchiness of the water-spider, tenaciously holding to its upstream position by means of the faintest ripples, while making one aware of the current of death and the darkness below."

ANTHONY RUSSO

One of the best documented stylistic shifts in the history of American poetry is the steady loosening of Lowell's muscle-bound style leading up to the epoch-making *Life Studies* in 1959, the volume in which Lowell mined his own family history and "put down the names." Many factors contributed to that loosening, not least his encounter with Bishop's poetry and short stories. On a trip to the West Coast during the spring of 1957, when he read his poems in front of audiences who expected a more relaxed and spontaneous phrasing closer to the Beats, Lowell found himself unstitching the tight pattern of his poems. "I'd make little changes just impromptu," he said. "I began to have a certain disrespect for the tight forms. If you could make it easier by just changing syllables, then why not?"

During a stay at the McLean Hospital the following year, recovering from another bout with mania and feeling "drained of new poems," Lowell turned to translation instead. His familiarity with the languages involved was spotty, and the prose versions he relied on allowed him to "disrespect" tight forms. The result was *Imitations*, the bracing book of exceedingly free translations that he dedicated to Bishop and published in 1961. "Sing for me, Muse, the mania of Achilles," the book opens. Lowell's version of "The Killing of Lykaon," the episode that meant so much to Simone Weil in her analysis of the *Iliad* as "the poem of force," portrays Achilles as he brutally murders one of Priam's sons after patiently explaining his reasons: "You too must die, my dear. Why do you care? / Patroklos, a much better man, has died." *Imitations* closes with mania as well, in a quiet poem of Rilke's about the homecoming of pigeons: "body and gravity / miraculously multiplied by its mania to return." Despite the hyped-up tenor of the book, especially in the Baudelaire and Rimbaud versions, some of its

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best moments are quiet. A lovely poem by the German romantic poet Hebel, in which a father and son discuss the fate of man-made things, echoes Achilles: "the hour will strike, / when even Basel must fall down and die."

Like many readers, Bishop was not wild about *Imitations*, thinking that Lowell, who confessed to having "dropped lines, moved lines, moved stanzas, changed images, and altered meter and intent," had played a little too fast and loose with the originals. "When those dead translations enter the Cabinet of Dr. Cal, they become almost too much alive," she wrote. She felt a kindred uneasiness when Lowell, toward the end of his life, published *The Dolphin*, chronicling the collapse of his marriage to Hardwick and a new life begun with the English novelist Caroline Blackwood. Bishop objected to poems in which Lowell quoted from Hardwick's letters, revising them to fit his aesthetic needs. "One can use one's life as material—one does, anyway," she wrote, "but these letters—aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission—IF you hadn't changed them … etc. But *art just isn't worth that much*."

In 1973, Lowell published *The Dolphin* along with two other books of sonnets, *History* and *For Lizzie and Harriet*. He had culled these latter sequences from *Notebook*, separating out the more public poems from the private ones and revising—"spoiling by polishing," he feared—as he did so. What was lost in all this re-organization was the jarring juxtapositions of public and private, past and present, in *Notebook*, the "skipping" that Bishop considered its most effective attribute.

> I really don't know what to say at all—I am overcome by their sheer volume partly, but also by the range, the infinite fascinating detail, the richness, and everything else. I shall have to read them many more times through to get it all. I think I did say something about the earlier version to you in Boston—the kind of overall surrealism I get from them, the skipping and returning, and repeating, and the surrealism—if that is the word—being *in* the skips, or the "pattern" rather than in the separate sonnet.

In her moving elegy for Lowell, "North Haven," Bishop wrote with apparent relief: "You can't derange, or re-arrange, / your poems again."

If one wished to compile a list of poems to read along with *Words in Air*, one might begin with Bishop's "The Armadillo," dedicated to Lowell, and Lowell's "Skunk Hour," dedicated to Bishop. These poems have the darting, associative speed and the "drifting description," as Lowell called it, of the American idiom unloosed. To these one might add the late and wonderful "Pink Dog," Bishop's last completed poem:

> The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.
> Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
> Naked, you trot across the avenue.
>
> Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
> Naked and pink, without a single hair…
> Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.

These remarkable poems, partly inspired by animals and partly inspired by each other, would help to clarify how the letters collected in *Words in Air* themselves contributed significantly to the best work of Lowell and Bishop, its confident "skipping" and "sketchiness."

Indeed, in the back-and-forth of these letters, we can see a kind of mutual schooling, as Lowell learned to trust the quick shifts and associative "water-striding" of Bishop's descriptions, even as Bishop learned to honor the weight of her own life experiences. She wrote poignantly of the "sure feeling" she sensed in Lowell's best work:

> as if you've been in a stretch (I've felt that way for very short stretches once in a long while) when everything and anything suddenly seemed material for poetry—or not material, seemed to be poetry, and all the past was illuminated in long shafts here and there, like a long-waited-for sunrise. If only one could see everything that way all the time! It seems to me it's the whole purpose of art, to the artist (not to the audience)—that rare feeling of control, illumination—life is all right, for the time being. ◆

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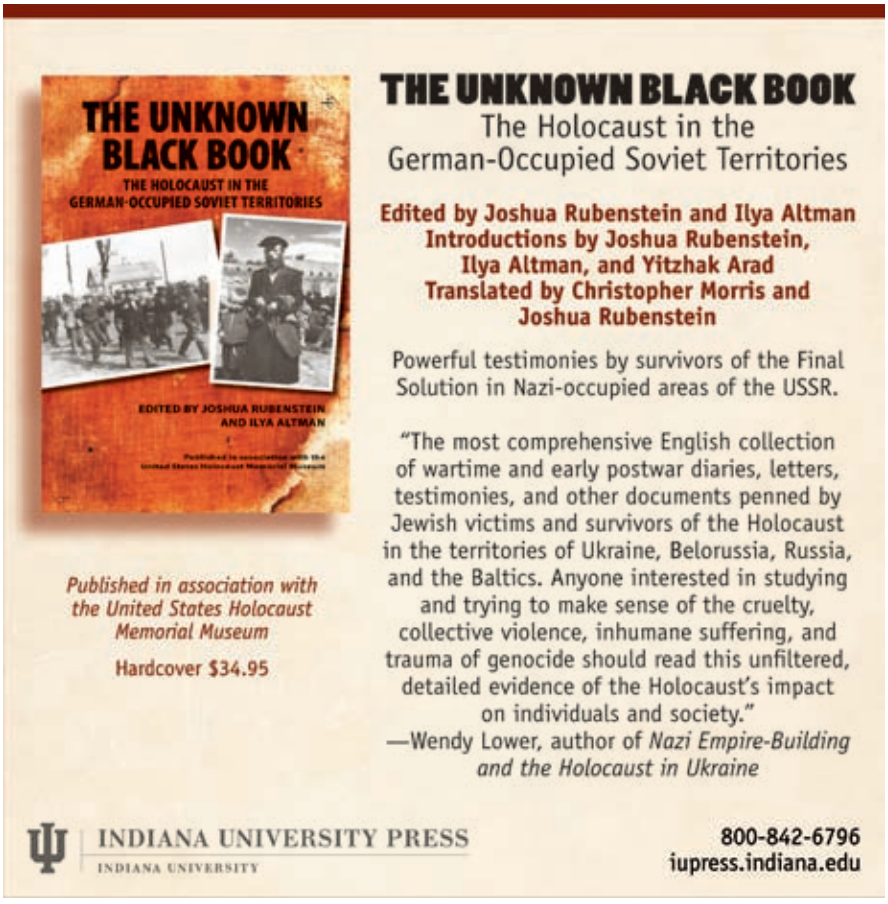
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Alan Wolfe

GONZO SOCIOLOGY

THE POLITICS OF TRUTH: SELECTED WRITINGS OF C. WRIGHT MILLS
Edited by John Summers
(Oxford University Press, 320 pp., $21.95)

C. Wright Mills published his sociological trilogy during the 1950s: *White Collar* in 1951, *The Power Elite* in 1956, *The Sociological Imagination* in 1959. Those were years of Republican ascendancy, and while the president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was a moderate, the vice president, Richard Nixon, and a number of key senators, including Joe McCarthy, belonged to the conservative wing of the party. By decade's end, the country was tiring of Republican rule and its accompanying scandals and foreign policy failures, and was harkening to the appeals of a young, ambitious, brash, Catholic politician who called for change. The times were perfect for a radical such as Mills to make his mark.

Almost a half-century later, the United States once again faces a choice between an incumbent conservative party with little public appeal and a young, dynamic politician whose race, rather than his religion, sets him apart from the usual run of presidential contenders. This time, though, there is no single social critic publishing books documenting the hold that powerful military and economic forces have over the country's destiny, and lamenting the decline of a vibrant public sphere, and urging intellectuals to dissent as loudly as they can from the prevailing complacency. Lacking a Mills of our own, we may turn back to the original. Oxford University Press has recently re-published Mills's trilogy, and *The New Men of Power*, Mills's book on labor leaders, which appeared in 1948, has been reissued by the University of Illinois Press. And now John Summers, an intellectual historian who has written widely on Mills—including a devastating essay in the *Minnesota Review* documenting the extent to which another sociologist, Irving Louis Horowitz, now something of a neoconservative but then more radical, mistakenly recounted the facts of Mills's life and prevented others from gaining access to the Mills papers that Horowitz kept over the objections of Mills's widow—has brought together a collection of Mills's essays, which he calls *The Politics of Truth*.

Mills, born in Waco, Texas in 1916, lived for only forty-six years; but during that time he published a significant body of work. He was a sociologist at Columbia for most of his career, and his style ranged from the scholarly—a dissertation on American pragmatism, studies of character and social structure, a collection and translation of the major essays of Max Weber—to popular books dealing with current events such as *The Causes of World War III* (1958) and *Listen, Yankee* (1960). Since literature did not much interest him, Mills was never a public intellectual in the mode of Alfred Kazin or Irving Howe, and he lacked Hannah Arendt's familiarity with continental philosophy; but still he treated a wide variety of topics that set him apart from the academic specialists of his day.

Choosing from the plethora of Mills's publications is no easy task. Summers has handled this chore wisely, rejecting a handy potpourri in favor of concentrating on what Mills had to say about a particular problem: the role that intellectuals should play in contemporary society. Not only do we have access in this volume to some of the more inaccessible of Mills's writings on this subject, we also get a glimpse at the book that Mills was under contract to write at the time of his death in 1962: *The Cultural Apparatus, or The American Intellectual*. Three lectures that Mills delivered on the BBC's Third Programme constitute the bulk of this material, and they provide a pretty good idea of the kind of arguments that Mills would have made had he not suffered a fatal heart attack.

There are many reasons to be interested in Mills's views on intellectuals. In our day, passions express themselves in politics primarily through blogging, a medium at which Mills, with all his radio addresses and pamphlet-like polemics, might well have excelled. The fact that so much of what passes for intellectual inquiry takes place within think tanks created to advance specific ideological agendas would have confirmed Mills in his insistence that intellectuals are corrupted by power and status. Mills denounced his sociological colleagues in the academy for their grand theorizing on the one hand and their mindless number-crunching on the other; and while grand theory has gone out of fashion, at least in the United States, quantitative social science is more entrenched than ever. And just as John F. Kennedy was part of the same spirit that eventually produced the New Left, the young activists attracted to Barack Obama may well launch an even newer one in the next few years. Should Obama lose, a McCain presidency is likely to send thousands of angry protesters into the streets. Should Obama win, he will no doubt disappoint some of his more fervent supporters, who will grimly detail once again the many ways in which liberals sell their souls to corporate and military interests.

Anger, in short, is likely to characterize the American mood in the years following the Bush administration, and few writers were better at expressing anger than C. Wright Mills. Reading him in 1960, the gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson wrote that he "jolted me out of my chair. It's heartening to know that there are still people around with the simple guts to move in on the boobs with a chain-mace." Boobs—not the body parts but the political know-nothings—can certainly be taken for granted these days. The only question is whether intellectuals will attack them with chain-maces. If they do, C. Wright Mills will be their man.

"The most important problem for political reflection in our time has to do with the problem of responsibility," Mill wrote in response to some of the criticisms that were directed against *The Power Elite*. It was an odd term for a radical to use. We usually think of responsible people as those who obey laws, respect tradition, and honor authority—one reason why the New Leftists and hippies who followed in Mills's footsteps treated the notion of responsibility with disdain. The last thing the substance-abusing, serial-womanizing Hunter S. Thompson wanted from the writers he admired was lectures on abstinence.

Mills was attracted to the theme of responsibility because his style of social criticism ranked hypocrisy among the most serious of vices: you, the protectors of power and privilege, claim to be acting as responsible managers of the national interest, but in reality you are oblivious to the havoc produced by your decisions. Many of the terms that

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made Mills famous—"crackpot realism," "the American celebration," "the military metaphysic"—were pithy expressions of the failure of America's leaders to live up to the ideals that they espoused. The role of the social critic was not to posit unrealizable utopias. It was to hold people accountable for their decisions.

If you are not going to be responsible, Mills went on to say to the powers of his day, intellectuals will have to do it for you. "The intellectual ought to be the moral conscience of his society, at least with reference to the value of truth," he wrote in *Dissent* in 1955, "for in the defining instance, that is his politics." Unlike businessmen or military officers, intellectuals need not say one thing and do another—not as long as they adhere to their proper calling. "The work of any man of knowledge, if he is the genuine article," Mills continued, supplying the words that give this book its title, "does have a distinct kind of political relevance: his politics, in the first instance, is the politics of truth, for his job is the maintenance of an adequate definition of reality." Mills was not given to underplaying the importance of the kind of intellectual work in which he was engaged. "Since we belong among those who ask serious questions and try to answer them," he told a group of Canadian educators in 1954, "we also belong—whether or not we know it—to that minority which has carried on the big discourse of the rational mind, the big discourse that has been going on, or off and on, since western society began some two thousand years ago in the small communities of Athens and Jerusalem."

Mills, it is frequently pointed out, was a distinctively American thinker—a "native radical," in the words of his biographer Rick Tilman. His emphasis on hypocrisy was the most American of all his American features. Unlike the writings of the European intellectuals of his time, on the left and on the right, Mills's writings lack a tone of world-weary cynicism. It does not generally occur to him that people can be more dangerous by sincerely trying to impose their ideas on others than by guilefully failing to live up to them. Never one to mince his words, Mills had a ready answer to the question of who was the greatest critic of America ever produced in America: Thorstein Veblen. "He believed that the very Men of Affairs whom everyone supposed to embody sober, hard-headed practicality were in fact utopian capitalists and monomaniacs; that the Men of Decision who led soldiers in war and who organized civilians' daily livelihoods in peace were in fact crackpots of the highest pecuniary order," Mills wrote. "They had 'sold' a believing world on themselves; and they had—hence the irony—to play the chief fanatics in their delusional world." Mills admired Veblen for the same reason that Marx loved Balzac: he was unafraid to tell us that our illusions are just that—and therefore better off lost.

Mills's emphasis on the failure of people to live up to their ideals leads him to some unusual places for a radical. It is all but forgotten now, but the idea *du jour* of social criticism in the 1950s was "mass society." Helped along by the experience of totalitarianism, intellectuals looked at their world (the one now portrayed in the popular television series "Mad Men") and saw conformity and oppression everywhere. Marx and his notion of class conflict were obsolete; we were now threatened by Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority and Ortega y Gasset's revolt of the masses. That these thinkers were anything but radicals themselves did not bother those, including Mills, who found the concept of mass society attractive.

In the lectures that previewed the book he was writing at the time of his death, Mills elaborated on his notion of the Cheerful Robot. "We know that men can be turned into robots—by chemical means, by physical coercion, as in concentration camps, and so on," he told his British listeners. "But we are now confronting a situation more serious than that—a situation in which there are developed human beings who are cheerfully and willingly turning themselves into robots." It might seem an exaggeration to claim that pressures toward conformity constituted a more serious danger to the human condition than Auschwitz and the Gulag, but such was the tone of the social thought of Mills's era. Mills lived in West Nyack, New York, a Rockland County suburb, and one of his neighbors, Betty Friedan, would soon write a book comparing the suburban home to the Nazi death camps.

The attraction to the idea of mass society caused all kinds of problems for Mills, and not only because the comparison with totalitarianism was way off the mark. To make the point that modern society was bad, Mills needed examples of societies that he considered good, and he inevitably found them in the past. The eighteenth-century founders of the American republic may have been slaveholders and aristocrats, but for Mills they were "men of culture" who "pursued learning," and compared with the era in

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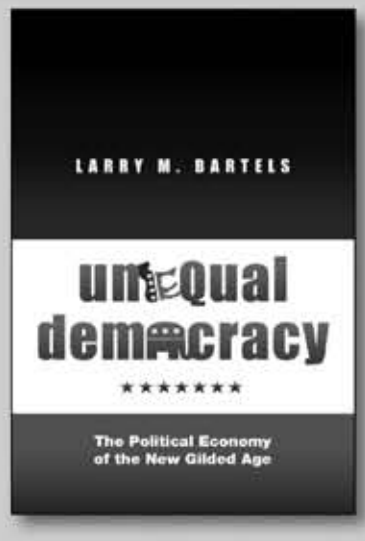

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which they lived, the United States has "suffered grievous decline." In contrast to the dreary office-going lives of commuters, Mills admired the old value of craftsmanship, thereby idealizing nineteenth-century forms of work that were not quite so attractive to those who lived them out. One unfortunate tendency of American historiography is progressivism, the conviction that things are constantly getting better. Mills exemplified Americanism's other fatal flaw: the declinist narrative of the fall from grace. But alas, what worked for Increase Mather did not work for C. Wright Mills. It made him into a romantic in radical garb. His romanticism colored his conception of the responsibility of the intellectuals, and finally undid it.

One of the most important essays ever written on the subject was Max Weber's "Politics as a Vocation." Weber's lecture, delivered in a moment of revolutionary fervor to students at the University of Munich in 1918, made a sharp distinction between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of ultimate ends. Those who seek radical transformations in the nature of human beings, Weber maintained, should not seek them through politics, because politics is always and everywhere about managing the means of violence. Responsibility, in a political context, emphasizes above all else dispassion, a close connection between ends and means, and a clear-eyed realism. Knowing that the consequences of his acts might bring death and destruction, the responsible politician will act with care and caution. The last thing a politician should be guided by is a romantic sensibility.

It was Mills who made Weber's great lecture available to American readers, in 1946, with Hans Gerth, in their influential volume *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. It is odd, then, that Weber's analysis played so little part in the way Mills treated the question of responsibility. The thinkers most influenced by Weber's essay were those committed to the "end of ideology," especially Daniel Bell, whose reflections on the subject of intellectual life were an extended and searching gloss on "Politics as a Vocation." Mills had nothing but contempt for Bell, who cheerfully returned the favor. "The end-of-ideology is a slogan of complacency, circulating among the prematurely middle-aged, centered in the present, and in the rich Western societies," Mills wrote in "Letter to the New Left" in 1960. "In the final analysis, it also rests upon a disbelief in the shaping by men of their own futures—as history and as biography. It is a consensus of a few provincials about their own immediate and provincial position."

Those were fighting words then—and they read like fighting words today. Intellectuals should not be complacent, Mills proclaimed in ringing terms. If an intellectual knows what is true, he should proclaim it, gonzo-style, throwing caution to the wind. Weber's ethic of ultimate ends was the one Mills thereby endorsed, and the ethic of responsibility was the one he rejected. For Mills, moderation in the pursuit of truth was no virtue.

Mills's failure to take Weber's warning seriously makes sense only if one views intellectuals as operating in a different moral universe from the one occupied by politicians. This is certainly how Mills understood the matter: there are people who urge truth to power and people who use power to obscure truth, and never do the twain meet. Thus the responsibilities of dissent have little or nothing to do with the responsibilities imposed by the state's monopoly on violence. Intellectuals, not holding power and likely never to do so, are free to be advocates of radical change without giving much thought—as Mills rarely did—to how power actually should be organized and distributed.

Europeans are likely to think about these issues differently. Weber's lecture was prompted by a situation in which socialists managed to grab power in Munich by means of a short-lived revolution; and after the left-wing revolution was suppressed, a far-right movement, failing to launch a successful putsch in the city, eventually took over the entire country in the form of Nazism. Down to our times, the line between dissent and power is harder to draw in Europe than in the United States. Václav Havel was both a dissident and a president, and the foreign ministers of both France and Great Britain emerged, much like the former foreign minister of Germany, out of a New Left milieu. (*The Politics of Truth* contains words of praise for Ralph Miliband, the Marxist thinker whose son is now the British foreign secretary.) For those who work in such an environment, dissent can be a path to power as well as an alternative to it. Even when out of power, a responsible political intellectual is therefore a kind of politician anticipating when power might fall his or her way. If there is a chance that you might wind up among the power elite, you are likely to think differently, and sometimes more scrupulously, about power.

One can never know these things for sure, but had Mills lived until the present day he would in all likelihood not have abandoned his radicalism; his was not the kind of sensibility that welcomes reevaluations. And even though Mills never imagined himself actually holding power, his reflections on responsibility are deeply flawed by the sharp contrast that he makes between the politician and the political intellectual. By proclaiming that the intellectual should be responsible only for the truth, Mills seemed to believe that what is true is always clear (a position that he denied when he criticized the abstract empiricists among his fellow sociologists who were trying to establish scientifically valid truths about society). Even if the truth were clear, moreover, it does not follow that those who possess it are always right. If they insist upon it to the exclusion of everything else that is true, they become sectarians rather than intellectuals, zealots so persuaded that they are right that they are likely to denounce (and in some instances destroy) anyone who deviates from what they believe. There is such a thing as a politics of truth. There is also such a thing as a politics of humility. Mills was dazzled by the former and blind to the latter.

It is for this reason, I believe, that the man comes across as such an unpleasant figure in this collection of his writings. *The Power Elite* has its shortcomings: it fails to appreciate the extent to which the three legs of power that Mills identifies—political leaders, economic tycoons, and military officers—can struggle with each other, and it never satisfactorily explains why the American public was willing to accept a state of affairs that Mills found so problematic. But when Mills responds to his critics, he treats them with sarcasm and disdain. Hectoring was his *métier*. Asked to speak before a group of ministers in Canada, he delivered a blistering attack on them for their political apathy, reprinted here as "A Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy." He never seemed to recognize, as a more nuanced critic might have, that if Christians did become more active in politics, and especially if they took seriously Mills's

ANTHONY RUSSO

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injunction that they place a priority on the sanctity of life, they might espouse views far more conservative than those admired by Mills. (War was a public issue in the 1950s; abortion was not.) Had I been in that audience on that occasion, I would have wondered who this pagan thinks he is, telling me what I ought to believe and do.

Like politicians today who are instructed never to admit a mistake, Mills huffs and puffs when the flaws in his writings are pointed out. In 1954, in an address to the National Conference on Methods for the Study of the Urban Community, he argued that "we have moved a considerable distance along the road to the mass society" and "at the end of that road there is totalitarianism, as in Nazi Germany or in Communist Russia." This is, to say the least, a harsh judgment about where our society is headed. And so Mills also says that phrases such as "mass society" are to be taken as "extreme types," as constructions meant to suggest trends rather than as empirical descriptions. Mills engaged in this sleight of hand whenever he was attacked by his critics for his caricatures. "Quite deliberately, of course, I have stated in *The Power Elite* an 'extreme position'—which means that in order to make matters clear I try to focus on each trend just a little ahead of where it is now," he told his critics. I love that "of course," which shows that Mills wanted to have it both ways—to make the most flamboyant pronouncement and then, when called on it, to suggest that his critics are the ones really at fault, since they simply fail to understand his methodology. Despite the similarity between his notion of an extreme position and Weber's concept of an "ideal type," Mills was not seeking understanding so much as he was dramatizing his conclusions. A man less persuaded of his own righteousness would have admitted as much.

Although most of the essays assembled in *The Politics of Truth* portray the intellectual as a man of independence resisting the temptations of power and popularity so as to speak his mind, not all of them do. In fact, three of the essays reprinted here make the opposite point: the intellectual should hide his real convictions, and kowtow to the powerful, and advocate double standards. These are the essays that deal with communist societies, especially the Soviet Union and Cuba.

Mills never quite made up his mind about Marxism. At times he portrayed the Marxist project as outdated because of its emphasis on class conflict and its naïve—Mills calls them "Victorian"—assumptions about Western progress. At other times, particularly in *The Marxists*, which appeared in 1962, he found in Marxism a viable alternative to liberalism. Still, he was never a vulgar Marxist. For a thinker so influenced by the American experience, there were sources other than Marxism to which one could turn, including pragmatism, syndicalism, and anarchism; and Mills was too eclectic to chain himself to an ideological system.

But alas, when it came to regimes claiming to embody Marxist principles, Mills was more charitable. From time to time Mills denounced Stalinism, but so desperate was he to find an alternative to the way that public business was conducted in the United States that he regularly muted his criticisms of societies that called themselves socialist. Mills traveled to the Soviet Union in 1960 and kept a journal of his experiences. According to Summers, the journal records his dismay with Soviet intellectuals who speak "like parrots who mouth a formula." Yet the section from the journal that Summers reprints in the book, which features an interview with Alexander Chakovski and Raisa Orlova, comes across as a chatty interchange between writers comparing notes on how to get published—this at a time when Nadezhda Mandelstam was still banished from Moscow and Vasily Grossman was unable to publish *Life and Fate*. Nowhere in the interview do we witness Mills as the angry young man denouncing the powerful and rallying the dissidents. Instead we have him explaining his concept of the Cheerful Robot to his Soviet interlocutors. The spectacle is repulsive.

Much of the sociological analysis that Mills made of the United States proved to be correct; there really *was* an economic and military power elite in the 1950s, whose power was so out of balance that even Eisenhower called attention to it in his farewell address. We can still read *The Power Elite* and *White Collar* and learn from them, and the same cannot be said about much of the academic sociology of the 1950s that Mills spent so much time criticizing. ("Who now reads [Herbert] Spencer?" Talcott Parsons once asked. The same could now be said of Talcott Parsons.) Corrupt union leaders, self-satisfied reactionary businessmen, and trigger-happy generals certainly deserved loud and critical scrutiny, and Mills, better than any other figure of his time, offered it.

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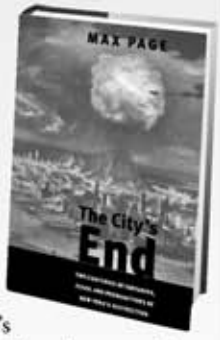

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That Mills was often so right about the United States makes it that much more peculiar that he was always so wrong about the Soviet Union. Mills believed that the Soviet Union was just a couple of years away from providing bread without cost to all of its citizens. (This is where he cites Ralph Miliband, who had proposed the same idea.) "If the United States did that," Mills points out, "the associated bakers of Cleveland, etc. would be most upset!" Still, why not? "There is nothing inherent in the economy of the Soviet Union that prevents this being done. Such things are not just utopian dreams, they are soon going to be perfectly possible for the Soviet Union.... Imagine the world effect if they were to say that from now on bread is a 'natural human right,' or whatever way they wish to put it!" Like Lincoln Steffens before him, Mills had seen the future and had little doubt that it could work.

At a time when American cold warriors were exaggerating Soviet military and economic power, Mills can be forgiven for not realizing that the Soviet Union he visited was twenty-five years away from collapse. Less forgivable is his idea that the Soviet Union and the United States were more similar than different. In 1964, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington published a book called *Political Power: USA/USSR*, in which they raised—only to reject—"convergence theory," the notion that the two societies fighting the Cold War would become increasingly similar to each other. Although they did not list Mills among the convergence theorists, he belonged there. In the first of the lectures that he delivered to the BBC outlining his book on the intellectuals, Mills argued that the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union were antagonists gave them all too much in common. Both concentrated economic and military power. Each filled up its respective continent and was therefore culturally diverse.

And the similarities did not end there. Mills saw in both the United States and the Soviet Union all the features of modern mass society of which he disapproved. "The power of both is based upon technological development. In both, this development is made into a cultural and a social fetish, rather than an instrument under continual public appraisal and control. In neither is there significant craftsmanship in work or significant leisure in the non-working life. In both, men at leisure and at work are subjected to impersonal bureaucracies. In neither do workers control the process of production or consumers truly shape the process of consumption." We have a power elite, they have a power elite. Convergence!

Mills was so persuaded of the convergence thesis that he saw little or no significant difference between the two systems when it came to the life of the mind. In the third and last of his lectures, Mills proclaimed that "in neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. is there a set of free intellectuals, inside as well as outside the universities, which carries on the big discourse of the Western world and whose work is influential among parties and movements and publics." And even if there were, he continued, they could never get their message across: "In neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. are there media of genuine communication, freely and regularly open to such intellectuals, and with the aid of which they translate the private troubles of individuals into public issues, and public issues into their meanings for the private life; accordingly, in both there prevails a higher and irresponsible ignorance, and an isolation of the free intelligence from public life."

If Mills believed this, one wonders why he wrote as much as he did. If it were really impossible for American intellectuals to expose the connections between private troubles and public issues, one might as well become a number-cruncher. Mills the social critic was going out of his way to make Mills the sociological observer obsolete. And he seemed to take pleasure in doing so. In an interview with a group of Mexican writers, he confessed to his own impotence:

> It is only when freedom doesn't make any real difference in the power sense, or when it isn't used, that one is quite free. U.S. intellectuals, for example, are very free people, in the formal sense of being able to write anything. I think that any book with any kind of quality, regardless of what it says, or what it condemns in the U.S., will find a publisher.... But it doesn't seem to make much difference. Why? Because my omnivorous society is so politically apathetic and so clownish in its cultural and political tastes that it will celebrate, and even make rich, a writer who has utterly condemned its very foundations.

May I nominate these words as the most irresponsible that Mills ever uttered? If you are an intellectual fortunate enough to live in a society that allows its writers to publish their books without censorship and cannot arrest you for what you believe, you ought to encourage intellectuals from less fortunate societies to struggle as hard as they can to enjoy the same freedoms that you do. By denouncing his own society for being little different from authoritarian ones, Mills was dealing a blow to the cause of dissent in the orbit of totalitarianism, and also pandering to the prejudices of his non-American audiences. In so doing, he not only failed to condemn the repression of writers and intellectuals in those societies, he all but excused it. Our clownish tastes, their secret police—it's all the same. That may be the way the world looked to Professor Mills on Morningside Heights, but when the authorities will not let you publish a book that at times rivals *War and Peace* in its emotional power—I am referring to Vasily Grossman's great novel—then you are likely to think differently.

Mills's ideas about the Soviet Union were bad enough, but his thoughts on Cuba were worse. *Listen, Yankee* was published in 1960, and in it Mills made it clear what role the intellectual should play when it came to Third World revolutions. Persuaded that little freedom of thought existed in his own country, which meant that all the news from Cuba would be hostile to what Fidel Castro was trying to achieve, he believed that "Cuba's voice is a voice that must be heard in the United States of America." His mission was therefore to go to Cuba, listen to what its leading revolutionaries had to say, and translate their words into American terms for American readers. Any success on his part, he wrote, would not be owing to him, but to the fact that he was given "complete access to information and experience by Cubans close to events and who, once trust is established, are eager to express everything they feel."

Mills was persuaded that he had won their trust because they knew and respected his work. He was fooling himself. The people in Cuba to whom he spoke knew that he had chosen to be their mouthpiece, and they used him accordingly. In his own way, Mills acknowledged the truth of this. Cuba's voice, as he put it, required a hearing. But Cuba has no voice; only Cubans do. By claiming to speak for the entire society, Mills was cheerfully acknowledging that in this society there is no freedom for the individual, and that this does not overly trouble him.

In *Listen, Yankee*, Mills adopted the voice of a Cuban revolutionary explain-

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ing to his not-too-bright North American neighbors what his revolution is all about. "To most of us," Mills's revolutionary says, "our new beginning is the very best thing that has ever happened to us." For one thing, we are going to rid ourselves of Yankee imperialism, no longer allowing our island to be a paradise for gamblers and men in search of sex. But our revolution will prove to be far more than that. "In Cuba, we've just about solved the agricultural problem by our land reform: we've increased production and greatly diversified what we are growing." A consumer-goods industry is about to be born. Industrial production will take off. Most important of all, we will be a model for other countries in Latin America. "This continent is going to become the scene of convulsions you've never dreamed of." Wake up before it is too late, Yankee. We have been poor but we have our pride. "But we are glad, we have to be glad, that finally many things that must be done are now being done in Cuba."

Cuba's socialist experiment failed so miserably that, except for those who are still persuaded that it embodies some principle in which they continue to believe, the re-publication of these words is bound to diminish Mills's reputation. This is why I am glad that John Summers, who generally admires Mills, nonetheless included a selection from *Listen, Yankee* in his collection. It illustrates where Mills went wrong when he wrote about intellectuals and their responsibilities. When he concentrated on the United States, Mills did not think that the role of the intellectual was at all complicated: there was truth, there was power, and the one was to be chosen over the other. But after he began to travel outside the United States, Mills discovered that "the problem of the intelligentsia is an extremely complicated set of problems," as he explained in one of his BBC lectures. "In doing this work," he said about the life of the mind, "we must—above all—not confuse the problems of the intellectuals of West Europe and North America with those of the Soviet Bloc or with those of the underdeveloped worlds. In each of the three major components of the world's social structure today, the character and the role of the intelligentsia is distinct and historically specific."

What follows from this could not be clearer. For all of Mills's insistence that intellectuals dedicate themselves to a politics of truth, truth for him did not amount to the universal imperative so prominent in his earlier essays. So long as some country somewhere is challenging American hegemony, speaking power to truth is more important than speaking truth to power. The independent radical had become the fellow traveler. It is not a pretty sight.

Some of C. Wright Mills's ideas deserve to be brought back to life. Many of today's intellectuals tackle the problems that he addressed, but very few have the capacity to tie them all together, somehow managing to make a critique of academic sociology seem as interesting as the Strangelovian fantasies of armchair strategic theorists. But if the next years are going to feature a renewed interest in radical ideas, we will need also to learn from Mills's mistakes. He is, among other things, a cautionary example.

The very first essay in Summers's collection, "The Powerless People," contains reflections about the intellectual life that Mills published in Dwight Macdonald's magazine *politics* in 1944. Mills addresses himself to "the difficulty of speaking one's mind for those who do not speak popular pieces." Writers seek a large audience, but the magazines and publishers who bring out their work are worried about the bottom line, and so they are unlikely to take on anything too risky. Universities "are still the freest of places in which to work," but "the trends which limit the independence of the scholar are not absent there." All this makes it enormously difficult for the independent thinker to retain his independence. Mills saw few ways to resolve this problem, and a pessimistic tone dominates this essay.

Demonstrating the spirit that would soon characterize the beatniks and then the New Left, Mills called upon intellectuals to resist these pressures to conform: "The basis of our integrity can be gained or renewed only by activity, including communication, in which we may give ourselves with a minimum of repression." It is a shame that Mills did not follow his own advice. It may well be true that in the United States intellectuals are unlikely to influence public affairs by advising, or even becoming, statesmen. All the more reason, then, for American intellectuals to use the one advantage that they unquestionably possess: the freedom to call things as they see them, in all their complication. Mills, finding himself swept up in the enthusiasm of his times, threw that advantage away. Let us hope that social criticism in the aftermath of George W. Bush does not do the same. ◆

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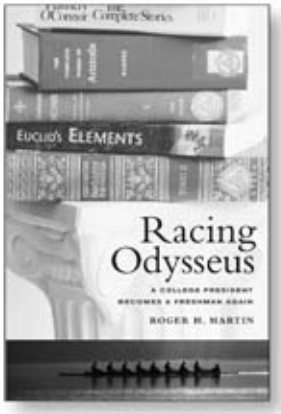
—Loren J. Samons II, author of *What's Wrong with Democracy*



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Francesca Mari

LOVE TOMORROW

LOVE TODAY
By Maxim Biller
Translated by Anthea Bell
(Simon and Schuster, 217 pp., $23)

THE GAME, that infamous black-imitation-leather-bound book about the seduction community, is a novel of sorts. There is a narrative. But really the writer, Neil Strauss, produced a guidebook with a glossary. I remember—the book appeared in 2005—how it spread through the dining halls and dormitories at Harvard, passed from one roommate to the next. This was not the game we played, or would ever play, or would ever *want* to play—well, or so we said. Yet the book held a certain attraction. No matter how much mockery was in our laughter, we flipped through it. Many started skimming and ended up reading the whole thing.

> **push-pull**—*noun*: a technique used to create or increase attraction, in which a man gives a woman indications that he is not interested in her followed by indications that he is. This sequence can take place in a few seconds—such as taking a woman's hands and then dropping them as if you don't trust her yet—or over time, such as being very nice during one phone conversation but then very distant and abrupt during the next one.

> **neg**—*noun*: an ambiguous statement or seemingly accidental insult delivered to a beautiful woman a pickup artist has just met with the intent of actively demonstrating to her (or her friends) a lack of interest in her. For example: "Those are nice nails; are they real?"

The Game has a clear thesis, and it was this practical aspect that allured us can-do-calculus-but-can't-cook-chicken undergraduates. *The Game* claims that seduction is simply about ambiguous signals. The cultivation of desire requires only a single tactic: mystery. And in explicit allegorical fashion, Mystery is the name of one of the book's protagonists—not the narrator, but his teacher. The narrator, who ultimately supersedes his poor crisis-conflicted master, calls himself Style. But "style," when it comes to the game of seduction, is simply the artful manipulation of "mystery." The one is just the cunning dressing-up of the other.

The book is reductive and ridiculous. It will not teach you how to find true love or how to forge a deep interpersonal connection, or probably even how to bed the semi-intelligent being next door. But it does capture something about the power dynamics of conquest—something true. Excelling at seduction means knowing how best to frame a hand: what cards to show, and when. After all, one of the prevailing symptoms of sweeping infatuation—of the kind of tyrannical attraction that knocks you in the gut and recalibrates time to its appetites—is over-sharing. Infatuation is accompanied by a rush in the throat. And for many, the rush is verbiage bubbling and broiling, eager to simmer over the lip and spill into even the most unrelated conversation.

This irritating loquaciousness has been noted in literature. Charlotte Brontë, for example, observed in *Villette* that "There is, in lovers, a certain infatuation of egotism; they will have a witness of their happiness, cost that witness what it may." And yet some of the most moving accounts of relationships are those that share the least. Among this group, Raymond Carver is the hero. And Richard Yates—another shrewd and cold student of love—once remarked about his novel *Revolutionary Road* that it was originally

> very thin, very sentimental. I made the Wheelers sort of nice young folks with whom any careless reader could identify. Everything they said was exactly what they meant, and they talked very earnestly together even when they were quarreling, like people in some Sloan Wilson novel. It took me a long time to figure out what a mistake that was—that the best way to handle it was to have them nearly always miss each other's points, to have them talk around and through and at each other. There's a great deal of dialogue between them in the finished book, both when they're affectionate and when they're fighting, but there's almost no communication.

Now the German writer and journalist Maxim Biller, who makes his English debut with a dark collection of twenty-seven vignettes translated by Anthea Bell, takes non-communication to the next level. Not only do his characters talk around and through and at each other, but Biller's narrators talk the same way to us, his readers: not stylistically—Biller writes in direct, declarative sentences—but with regard to revealing information, namely emotions. Does the fact that these characters say so few affectionate or even kind things mean that they are not in love? Gripped by the mystery, we read on to see. The effect—somewhat surprisingly—of leaving emotions unaddressed is emotional heft.

YET BILLER'S vignettes, however indirectly, draw an idiosyncratic taxonomy of contemporary relationships. Biller offers experiments in love, trial after trial of a few different types. The aesthetic is a control; and, as is the case with most fictional worlds, the characters share a general mentality, if not the same exact mind. Every writer fashions characters and settings of a particular time and place—in Carver, the motel or the tract house (now probably foreclosed); in Yates, the Greenwich Village apartment or the trim suburban home; and in Biller, the mod rooms and café lifestyle of a German-Jewish-Czech artist. Of each writer, one senses that his characters are of a single breed of mind, and that the plot merely tests them in different ways.

Biller's fragments are fresh and terrible—terrible being high praise. They are terrible in their effect, in their severe style and harrowing ability to arouse awe and anxiety simultaneously. The collection is called *Love Today*, which should set off some internal alarms. The two words are—or at least should be—mutually exclusive. So before going any further, we should clarify that Biller's episodes are actually about the pursuit of love rather than what can assuredly be called love itself. In fact, whether love ever exists is almost impossible to tell. That is the ambiguity that makes Biller's texts so seductive.

When a woman, never named, returns from her travels in India to Jordi, the man who has been "waiting and waiting and waiting" for her, she gives him a little wooden elephant. (The story is called "The Mahogany Elephant.") He goes to the kitchen to grab drinks and tosses the elephant into the garbage. Having considered and rejected the bottled water she requests, Jordi re-enters the

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living room with the wine he had purchased for her welcoming. "'Jordi,' she said, 'I didn't want wine.' 'No,' he agreed, 'it's still too early for wine.'" He proceeds to pour some into her glass. He "laid his arm on the back of the sofa behind her and left it there for a few minutes, but then he took it away again. The arm didn't feel quite sure of itself." Giving the arm agency is the closest Biller gets to commentary. And it smacks. He makes us feel self-consciousness, makes us feel the uneasy severance between body and mind: here are my thoughts, there is that limb.

She starts to talk about the elephant. She swears it is the fourth that she bought for him, having lost all the others, while he wanders into the kitchen to reclaim it before she realizes it is missing. He spreads the trash across the floor while she continues to talk and finds nothing. "'Actually that's not true,'" she says. "'I didn't want to bring you anything back.' There she was behind him all of a sudden. 'I simply forgot about you.'"

The ease with which these characters are cruel! Could it be true that she does not care? From initially being baffled, shocked, even disapproving of Jordi's tossing, we start to accept that there is a complexity to their history that we cannot see. So could it be true that she does not care? Could it be true even though, at the very end of the story, she tucks herself into his bed, fully clothed, and looks up and says, "All right, let's get married"? Or is this perhaps what Neil Strauss would deem, in his vulgar way, an elaborate "shit test"—"a question, demand, or seemingly hostile comment made by a woman intended to gauge whether a man is strong enough to be a worthy boyfriend or sexual partner"?

Does Ariel, the narrator in the story "Ziggy Stardust," really not like Edna, his childhood friend, even though he's funneled each of their encounters into a little vignette? When they are kids, Edna lends the Ariel her Bowie record (hence the title of the story). As an adult, Edna comes to his readings—but Ariel says that "there were other people there who mattered more to me." Two pages on he adds, "When I threw out my record player and sold all the records, I didn't stop to think that one of them was Edna's Ziggy Stardust." A few weeks later he buys it on CD. "Once home I put it on before I'd even taken my coat off," Biller writes. "After two or three songs I turned it off again, and stored it with the less important CDs." This sounds like an elaborate push-pull to me. When Ariel and Edna meet again, they begin dating, until one day she does not show up, and the next morning he briefly considers suicide before getting up and going to the bathroom. "I spent a long time shaving, I ate breakfast standing up, and I wrote two pages more than usual that day. I didn't look for Edna. I never called her again." If Biller had ended the negations there, he could be dismissed as merely dramatic. But he continues, "and I didn't ask anyone what had become of her," as if to *prove* that he neglected all efforts to find her. And that is the extent to which Ariel ever admits that he might care—that and a bit of jealousy a couple pages earlier. The strongest evidence of affection is not anything written, but the fact of the writing itself.

So even though the characters do not admit to feeling fondly toward one another, the yoking of two names across pages, and often across many years in narrative time, suggests as much. To justify the recurrence of names in proximity to each other, the reader assumes—and in assuming, manufactures—an attraction. Biller's art is the composition of negative space. His blanks create a tension, a non-verbal force field that shuns articulation and viscerally invokes the shackles of attraction. Rather than superficially surveying a scene, the reader is thrust into the waves of emotion and left to intuit the fickle forces controlling the tide.

What makes this interesting is the human proclivity to read positive things into ambiguity. A psychological study led by Michael I. Norton of the Harvard Business School found that online daters assessed the profiles of those they were about to meet almost twice as positively on average before meeting them than after. "People are so motivated to find somebody they like that they read things into the profiles," Norton observed. Such a finding may help to explain the Biller effect. Biller writes a whole book about love and only once, at the very end, shows us why anyone would want to seek it.

On the one hand, you could take what Biller writes at face value. The woman in "The Architect" is an Israeli in Germany anxious about going in to renew her visa on the last possible day, and possibly anxious about her relationship with her boyfriend, and perhaps even anxious about an insinuated affair with the architect who designed their apartment complex—which would be the most obvious explanation for why, in the facing

This book constitutes a surgical dissection of the Republican Party, exposing it as the Party of Big Business, the POBB. Furthermore it is the Party of White Males, lacking even a single black member in Congress. (The Democrats have 44). The POBB's Congressional ranks contain few women, only 27, while the Democrats have 64.

George Bush is quickly revealed as the Thief-in-Chief, after he purposefully purloined the 2000 election. Coupled with him is Dick Cheney. The two, plotting furiously, manufactured a cause for war with Iraq where absolutely none existed. Truth quickly became a casualty. Bush has already secured his position as the nation's worst Chief Executive.

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Kol Nidre

As to the deep ineradicable flaws
in the workmanship

anger and envy
anger and envy

stemming from over-enthusiasm
that rises like a water lily from mud

and the stone
of self, of ego

that insists on its imperial monologue
that strangles its audience

I would like to repent but I cannot
I am ridden like a horse

*

What does the contriver have in
mind
the contrivance wants to know

because otherwise what is the point
of all this moaning

pretending to be sorry for everything
groveling like a chained-up snake

crawling over a stone book
in the rain of words

for which someone is responsible
at times the food devours the eater

the pot wishes to speak to the potter
the clay chooses the hands

*

We are not competent to make our
vows
we are truly sorry

we pull you down from a cloud
or bend our knees to you like dogs

death breathing invisibly next to us
in the subway
in the office in the kitchen on the
park bench

we promise to love only you
faithful, faithful, we promise

we lie, we are not competent
still we implore you

please look at us and take us in your
arms
not like a master, like a mother

ALICIA OSTRIKER

building, the architect breaks down, thrashing against his office window when he sees the boyfriend force a kiss on his squirming girlfriend. The boyfriend is thinking about how nice it will be to have the girl gone—but when she says, "Suppose I have to go home," he answers, "If you have to go back, my angel, then I'll go with you, of course." Here, you can accept the surface scenario of such a story: they resent each other. Or you can read a little into them, embellish them, invent them a little more.

The disillusionment between the lovers is obvious. What holds them together despite it is not. Just when it seems certain that she is guilty, the girl stands behind her boyfriend, entwining her fingers in his belt loops as together they watch the architect's assistants drag him away from the window. The finger-looping is so intimate that despite all the other shirking and shafting, I began to doubt my own suspiciousness, and to think the best of the couple. If I projected anything into the ambiguities here, it was something warmer than what appears. (*Maybe he loves her . . . special scrambled eggs!*) The prognosis is still grim, but maybe, just maybe, there was once more to the relationship. In this way Biller's grimness strangely manipulates the reader into a bout of optimism, a passing will to believe.

The sparse prose of Carver, Biller's closest American cousin, does not elicit the same positive projections, in part because he simply is not as cold. Carver is, truth be told, sentimental. And the betrayals committed by his characters against their better inclinations makes it difficult to suspect that things might be rosier than they are. As soon as Carver's Duane mopes that Holly is his one true love, even though he cannot stop screwing the maid of the motel that he and Holly manage, we wonder. We stock the ellipsis with our own skepticism.

Unlike Biller, Carver discusses "love," the abstract noun, directly, in the words of characters with at least half a conscience. "What do any of us really know about love?" Mel asks in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love." "It seems to me we're just beginners at love. We say we love each other and we do, I don't doubt it. I love Terri and Terri loves me, and you guys love each other too. You know the kind of love I'm talking about now. Physical love, that impulse that drives you to someone special, as well as love of the other person's being, his or her essence, as it were. Carnal love and, well, call it sentimental love, the day-to-day caring about the other person." Biller can admit to carnal love, but his refusal to acknowledge fondness is part of his complete disavowal of everything sentimental. When he remembers, it is from a hazy distance. "I was sometimes so furious with her that I could have hit her," one of Biller's characters reminisces about an ex. "Of course I never did. Just sometimes, before we slept with each other, I pushed her arms down on the bed or put my hand around her neck. Then she got angry and sat on top of me and did something that hurt, I forget now just what it was." Even in this explicit confession, Biller defies sentimentality by refusing to remember the most intimate detail. More offensive than anything he did to her then is the fact that he does not remember anything about her now.

Whereas Carver largely restricts himself to the present, Biller often sweeps over years in a single sentence. Biller's shifting scenes dilate and contract almost at whim, like shapes in a kaleidoscope, ever at odds of rearranging—drawing close or pulling apart in the flick of an instant. A life's worth of romances can flash by in several pages; or, as in "Aviva's Back," Biller can recalibrate the play of a single moment: "Now, I thought. Now you put your hand on her back, now you move it over her hip to her stomach, now you draw her close. And then I did exactly that." The premeditated action, sensually illustrated step by step, unfolds in real time, while the actualization of that action, signified by "And then I did exactly that," is given the span of six words in which to spring forth, and so it replays in a fast-forwarded fashion, at four times the speed. A mid-level recalibration occurs in "The Mahogany Elephant" when Biller writes of Jordi that "he waited and waited. . . . Finally he did nothing at all; he didn't even wait anymore. He was sleeping less and less, he ate nothing but bread and tomatoes and yellow supermarket cheese, and then at last she came back, they sat together on his sofa, and she said, 'It's been a long time.'"

Biller collapses time so that blithely plopped onto the end of a sentence about waiting and waiting is the end of that wait. The indenture to time ends as unceremoniously as it was served—in the company of the yellow supermarket cheese. That yellow supermarket cheese is the perfect Biller detail. Its very gener-

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ality evokes emotional depth, calling to mind the industrial plastic wrap and the stale fluorescent lights of the supermarket that sells it. The cheese becomes a trace of banality and isolation. Preserved to outlive its natural course, the yellow cheese is a timeless substance, and yet its affiliation with place, with the trip to the supermarket, marks another stop in the tired routine of Jordi's waiting.

But Biller is most acute not when he hopscotches through thirty years, but when he bends down to pick up the crumbs of a single conversation. He does this in his best vignettes: in "The Mahogany Elephant" (or in most of it); in "The Architect"; in "It's a Sad Story," about an uncanny incident on a singles phone service; and in "Baghdad at Seven-Thirty," wherein a couple discuss their sexual problems at a bar while looking not at each other, but halfheartedly at footage of the Iraq war. It sounds angsty and trite, but the bartender who "often failed to hear" (which Biller plainly states is "why many customers didn't come back, but many came back for that reason") misreads the situation, making it anything but. In fact he misreads the situation much as I might—he regards it positively, suspecting that the old sweaty man will be lucky with the lovely girl, even though it is the old man who is uninterested.

Biller's pieces confront mixed signals and misreadings directly, at the very forks that determine the direction of a relationship. He captures them moment by moment, word by word, gesture by gesture. He doles out his details sparingly, so that they are irradiated with the significance of rarity. His details feel a little like secrets. ("A lover without indiscretion," remarked Thomas Hardy, "is no lover at all.") And yet the whole notion of the detail, when it comes to Biller, remains something of a paradox. For his details are not so much fillings as the perimeters of smaller cells, themselves begging to be filled. "She had the kind of eyes you call dark and interesting, and can quickly get on your nerves." I suspect each reader can supply his own image. I, for one, see the kind of luminous crescents that follow too closely. But are the dark, interesting, soon-to-be-irritating eyes that I see the ones Biller wants us to see? The subtle allure of Biller boils down to just this: yes, they are. This is the allure of ambiguity. To read is to interpret.

Of course, not all details need coloring. Some are beautiful as is, such as the image of the little boy "relaxed in sleep ... lying on his back, arms outspread as if he were falling." Time stops for a moment at the foot of the boy's bed, only to liken him to someone mid-fall, only to underscore the transience of this stillness, and the gravity that presses upon it. But most of Biller's "details" and dialogue feel precise, and this precision is owed unexpectedly to the space that Biller leaves for the reader's own imaginings. Negotiating such a balance in writing is more difficult than it sounds: anything too general leaves a gaping hole through which all weight escapes. But the vignettes that Biller constructs are porous, and concentrated so that more diffuses into them than out.

There is another way in which Biller's minimalism differs from Carver's. Carver's (mainly working-class) characters suffer from circumstance and often from an inability to articulate just what they want. Biller's characters, more solidly upper-middle or middle-middle class, are suppressed not so much by inability as unwillingness. Had Biller fleshed out his stories any more, his characters would become insufferably irritating. When Carver's stories are released unedited—the title story from his *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* has appeared in *The New Yorker* under its original title, "Beginners," and Carver's widow is agitating for the unedited republication of all seventeen of the stories in that collection—they will seem less evocative and less poignant, not because his characters will become irritating but because they will become a bit too pathetic. The less room we have to interweave our own emotions into the text, the less invested we become. This style—Biller's, Carver's—ought to retain the courage of its own minimalism.

It is fitting that Biller, although he speaks English, did not involve himself as Anthea Bell translated his vignettes. "I was happy that she agreed to translate them—that's it," he declared. "I would never interfere with other people's work." It is as if Biller writes in direct sentences so that his dialogue and his situations speak for themselves. Any ambiguities introduced by translation cannot ruin a style that is essentially ambiguous. They may even enrich the situation, since these are stories about the inevitability of mistiming or misinterpretation. These stories actually improve as the possibility of clear communication lessens.

Even the characters understand the value of obscurity. In "The Statement by Amos Oz," Biller writes:

> Before they disappeared into the night, Bella said, "Why do you think anyone wants to conquer someone else?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> "Really not?"
>
> "Maybe to discover that person's secret."

"Conquer," of course, is Biller's synonym for "seduce." His characters recognize the power of knowledge, and when they are not keeping the knowledge of themselves from one another, Biller is artfully keeping his knowledge of them from us. Is Biller's vision as dark as it appears? Are no conquests amicable? As it turns out, the answer doesn't much matter. Biller's characters are all too weary and aware for there to be any unwitting conquering at all.

Lovers are naturally hypercritical of each other, and so discovering a lover's secret—their vulnerability—before loving them has a chilly, demystifying effect. As Flaubert wrote in *Madame Bovary*, "The disparaging of those we love always alienates us from them to some extent. We must not touch our idols; the gilt comes off in our hands." Maxim Biller plucks these idols off the shelf and ponders them. He tosses them back and forth, and then returns them for another buyer, or another spectator. He goes home with his golded hands, hoarding the gilt so that when he writes it can snow onto his page. ◆

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Washington Diarist

There Will Be Blood

One of America's quadrennial rituals is liberal shock. Again the Democrats are surprised by the brutality of the Republicans. *They are lying.* Yes, they are. They want very much to win. *So should we lie, too?* "We" already have. (John McCain did not say that America should stay in Iraq for a hundred years.) The Democrats believe that, by running roughly, "we" become like "them." More grandly, the objection is that the moral character of a campaign is a premonition of the moral character of an administration. I do not see the correlation. The "missile gap" made possible the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The "Daisy Girl" was an indirect cause of the Voting Rights Act. And if, as a consequence of exaggerated or erroneous statements about John McCain, universal health care will be established by the next administration, well, the omelette will have been made. And "we" will not have become like "them," because "they" would not deliver this right and this relief to America. I apologize, of course, for my chilliness. I am not unmindful of the relationship of means to ends. I took Kant. But an election is not a seminar; and to worry the means so much more than the ends is also to distort the relationship. The air of ethical exquisiteness in which Barack Obama wraps himself has psychologically hobbled his party. It finds itself elevated and stunned. Yet there is nothing in the history of our democracy that warrants the belief that electoral politics should be elevating: in this regard, we have no height from which to fall. And there is the touchy question of whether the hope for consensus is not also the fear of conflict. Conflict is not—to use Obama's condescending language for whatever gets in his way—always "silly" and "a distraction." As the polls are again demonstrating, this is a divided country, and some of its divisions are honorable, matters of first principle, the effects of worldviews. Conviction is a hardening influence, a partisan thing. All the current talk about political syncretism obscures the fact that there is philosophical gridlock. That is why the "independents" will determine the outcome. Liberals must not perceive the world in the image of their pacific desire. But the Democrats appear to believe in soft power at home, too.

The latest refinement of the Democratic creed of soft power is the view that environmentalism is a foreign policy. A week after the Russian invasion of Georgia, I was present at a conversation about whether the crisis around Russia's borders could be relieved in part by the greening of Poland. I agreed that Putin has been emboldened by the new riches of Russia's natural resources, but I averred that even if Poland found a way to emancipate itself from foreign fuel, so that every one of its schools was powered by the sun and every one of its cafés by the wind, there would still be a foundation in reality for the anxiety about Russia. The new Russian imperialism is animated by more than the new prices of commodities. Chávez does not owe his socialism to his petroleum. And the horror in Sudan has not been perpetrated by the weather. The verdure of the Democratic foreign-policy discussion is a proper retort to George W. Bush's astounding delinquency about climate change; but energy does not explain everything. Green is not the only color. Indeed, monochromacy is a form of color-blindness. Even if we were to conquer our oil habit, we could not stand idly by if, say, jihadists came to power in Riyadh. (Israel is not the only reason.) A green world will not be a good world.

In the aftermath of the cold war, geo-politics was usurped by geo-economics. It is now being usurped by geo-ecology. In a way, geo-ecology is another version of geo-economics: since "the rise and fall of great nations is driven primarily by their economic strength" (the words are Richard Holbrooke's in *Foreign Affairs*), and since a revolution in energy will be necessary for the prosperity of the United States, it seems to follow that energy is strategy. I do not doubt that the strategic implications of global warming are vast, or that the economic might of America must be maintained. I am less sure that America's role in history can be explained in purely material terms. The important point, I think, is that even as we are living *la vie en vert*, we are discovering the durability of geo-politics, as the last wisp of "unipolarity" disappears from a world of rising and restive powers, regional and global. The task for liberals, who once knew how to admire capitalism without believing that it makes the world go round, is to take geo-politics back from the realists—to recognize that state power is the instrument not only of interests but also of ideas of justice. As long as states have the power to help or to hurt individuals and peoples, geo-politics will not escape morality. Geo-politics is not a cynic's game, even though cynics play it. But George W. Bush's idealist adventure in Iraq has seems to have left us with a dismal choice between the fuzziness of Al Gore and the scuzziness of Brent Scowcroft. The truth is that soft needs hard and hard needs soft.

The Bush administration has been singularly lacking in a sense of the earth, in a feeling of planetariness. It has taught American nationalism a terrible narrowness. For this reason, the rejection of Bush's indifference to climate change represents an expansion of the nationalist perspective. If we can damage the world, then we are citizens of the world. (How do you say that in Chinese?) Since the destruction of the environment is a global evil, environmentalism is a global standpoint, a cosmopolitanism. Yet the globalization of our self-conception is also an impoverishment of it. No heart beats at such a level of generality. What avenue is there to the universal, except the particular? The new emphasis upon planet-healing often comes with a dispassion about the less cosmic objectives of foreign policy, the traditional stuff, the mere tyrannies and aggressions and genocides. Now we are to take the side of nature. It is true that taking the side of nature is a way of taking the side of humankind—but it is not the only way. There is also the side of all the humankind now repressed and starved and trafficked and exiled and raped and slaughtered. All suffering is local. As long as the world is sickening, America must not lose interest in its hard power. The smart thing to say about foreign policy these days is that the age of humanitarian intervention is over, but this may be just the provincialism of cosmopolitans. Can nobody esteem the EPA and the Pentagon equally?

Leon Wieseltier

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As a world leader in its field, AREVA offers a unique integrated range of highly reliable and innovative solutions both for producing CO_2-free energy, and for transmitting and distributing electricity. Long established across the country, AREVA is proud of its ongoing contribution to the social and economic lives of the communities surrounding its 45 American sites. AREVA employs thousands of American experts who are dedicated to developing green energy alternatives such as nuclear energy, in order to help our nation achieve two goals: securing our energy supply and curbing CO_2 emissions.

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